

1.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; 3:1-20;
and John 1:19-29

The story of Jesus begins with John the Baptist, who was the son of a priest named Zechariah (Luke 1:5).

While Zechariah was serving as priest in the temple in Jerusalem, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that his wife would bear a son and that his son should be given the name “John” (Luke 1:13). The angel also said that John should drink no wine or strong drink and that from his birth he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15).

Zechariah was slow to believe what Gabriel had said, because he and his wife were elderly. Because of Zechariah’s disbelief, Gabriel told him that he would lose his ability to speak (Luke 1:20). So Zechariah lost his speech and did not regain it until after John was born.

After regaining his speech, Zechariah spoke a beautiful psalm (song) that contains prophecies concerning things that were about to happen (Luke 1:67-79).

John could have, presumably, become a priest, like his father; but God had other plans for him. God did not send John to sit at the feet of the learned teachers in Jerusalem. Instead, He sent him into the wilderness, where he grew and became strong in spirit (Luke 1:80).

John’s attire was similar to that of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). He wore a plain garment made of camel’s hair, which he held together with a leather belt around the waist. John’s lifestyle was severe. He often ate locusts and

wild honey, which could be found in the wilderness (Mark 1:6).

John began to preach during the 15th year of the emperor Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), that is, about 28 AD. He preached in the region around the Jordan River, saying,

“Repent,
for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Matthew 3:2 NIV

In doing this, John fulfilled a prophecy by Isaiah, which said,

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way--
a voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

Mark 1:2-3; Isaiah 40:3 NIV

John identified himself as being the one that God had sent to be a voice “calling in the desert” (John 1:23).

John’s message was that the kingdom of God was about to break forth and that people should get ready to receive it by repenting of their sins.

John also preached a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). This does not mean that he preached that people should get baptized in order to be able to repent. Rather, it means that people should repent so as to become proper subjects for baptism.

John was not anxious to baptize any unrepentant persons that came to him. He said to them,

“You brood of vipers!
Who warned you to flee
from the coming wrath?”

Luke 3:7 NIV

John also said to the Pharisees and Sadducees,

“Produce fruit
in keeping with repentance.”

Luke 3:8 NIV

John mentioned some specific things that people could do to demonstrate their repentance. He said that anyone that had two coats should give one away to someone that had none (Luke 3:11). Anyone that had (extra) food should do the same (Luke 3:11). John said that tax collectors should not collect more money than was due to them (Luke 3:13). To soldiers he said, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely” and “Be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14).

John said nothing, as far as the record goes, about keeping the Sabbath, celebrating the festivals, circumcising baby boys, or tithing, all of which seemed very important to most pious people in Israel in John’s day.

Many people thought that John the Baptist might be the Christ (Messiah), but John assured them that he was not (Luke 3:15-17). He preached that the Messiah would come

after him and that the Messiah would be greater than he (John). John said,

“I baptize you with water.
But one more powerful than I will come,
the thongs of whose sandals
I am not worthy to untie.
He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

Luke 3:16 NIV

When John started preaching, he did not know the identity of the Messiah (John 1:31). He knew, however, that the Messiah was coming. He also knew that the Messiah would be like a sacrificial lamb.

On a certain day, after John had baptized Jesus, he saw Jesus walking by and remarked to others about Him,

“Look, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 1:29 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think John could have served God, and advanced the kingdom of God more effectively, if he had served as a priest like his father? Please explain.
2. Were the people whom John baptized informed about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus before they were baptized? If they were not, does that make John's

baptism different from the baptism which Jesus' disciples later preached and practiced after Jesus was raised from the dead?

3. Jesus said that there had been no one born of woman greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). What do you suppose it was about John the Baptist that caused Jesus to praise him so highly?
4. Do you think you would have enjoyed associating with John the Baptists?

2.

JOSEPH AND HIS GENEALOGY

Matthew 1:2-25; 2:13-23

When Joseph found out that Mary, to whom he was engaged, was expecting a child, he did not want to accept her as his wife. Being a kindly man, however, and not wanting to expose her to shame or punishment, he planned to break off their engagement quietly. In the meanwhile, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

“Joseph son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary home
as your wife,
because what is conceived in her
is from the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 1:20 NIV

After Joseph heard this, he took Mary to be his wife (Matthew 1:24). When her baby was born, Joseph gave Him the name “Jesus” (Savior), because the angel had said to him,

“She will give birth to a son,
and you are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people
from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21 NIV

Matthew’s genealogy shows that Joseph was a descendant of Abraham through King David (Matthew 1:1-17).

A different genealogy can be found in the gospel of Luke (Luke 3:23-37). If we are to believe both genealogies, which I do, then one of them must be the family tree of Mary while the other must be the family tree of Joseph.

Both genealogies trace Jesus' lineage back to King David. They show Jesus to be a legal descendant of King David through Joseph and a biological descendant of King David through Mary. It was extremely important that Jesus be shown to be descended from King David, because the Christ (Messiah) was expected to come from David's family (Jeremiah 23:5).

In one place, Jesus is called "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3). In another He is called "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55). This suggests that Joseph was a carpenter and that Jesus learned the carpenter-trade from him.

We know that Joseph tried to abide by the laws of the land, for he went to Bethlehem in order to pay his tax, as a good citizen should; and he took Mary along with him.

We know that Joseph tried to comply also with the laws of God, for he had the baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day, as the Law of Moses prescribed (Luke 2:21). In addition, he took Jesus to Jerusalem in order to present Him to the Lord, as was proper; and he and Mary offered the appropriate sacrifice at the temple (Luke 2:22-24).

Joseph also seems to have been responsive to God's prompting. When an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him to escape to Egypt with his little family (Matthew 2:13), Joseph left immediately for Egypt (Matthew 2:14).

After King Herod died, an angel appeared to Joseph in Egypt and told him to return to the Land of Canaan, and he returned (Matthew 2:19-21). Joseph did not settle in Judah, however, due to the fact that King Herod's son Archelaus reigned there. Instead, he went north to Nazareth, in Galilee (Matthew 2:22-23).

It was at Nazareth that Jesus grew to manhood. Joseph's custom was to make a trip to Jerusalem every year for the Passover with his growing family (Luke 2:41).

Mary bore Joseph several children. Their sons were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas; and there were some daughters (Matthew 13:55-56).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think about Joseph? What kind of man was he?
2. Look through the genealogies in Matthew (chapter one) and in Luke (chapter three), and see if there are any names that you recognize. Please tell a thing or two about some of the persons, whose names you recognize in the genealogies.
3. Do you think Joseph faithfully carried out the responsibilities that God entrusted to him?

3.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-56

The angel Gabriel appeared to a young virgin named Mary in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. This occurred when Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist was six months pregnant. Mary was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, who was a carpenter.

The angel Gabriel said to Mary,

“Greetings,
you who are highly favored!
The Lord is with you.”

Luke 1: 28 NIV

Mary was greatly troubled at this greeting and did not know what to think of it. So the angel said to her,

“Do not be afraid, Mary,
you have found favor with God.
You will be with child
and give birth to a son,
and you are to give him the name Jesus.”

Luke 1:30-31 NIV

After Gabriel had said this, He spoke to Mary about the son, whom she would bear. He said,

“He will be great

and will be called the Son of the Most High.
The Lord God will give him
the throne of his father David,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob
forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Luke 1:32-33 NIV

Notice all the wonderful things that Gabriel said about Mary's son. He said:

- Her son would be great.
- He would be “the Son of the Most High.”
- He would sit on “the throne of his father David.”
- He would “reign over the house of Jacob forever.”
- Of His kingdom there would be no end.

Mary replied, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel Gabriel explained how it would be that she would conceive a child. He said,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High
will overshadow you.
So the holy one to be born
will be called the Son of God.”

Luke 1:35 NIV

The angel also informed Mary that her kinswoman Elizabeth was going to have a child, in her old age. The angel finished his conversation with Mary by saying,

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

Luke 1:37 NIV

Mary showed her submissive spirit by replying to the angel,

“I am the Lord’s servant,
May it be to me as you have said.”

Luke 1:38 NIV

After the angel left Mary, she immediately traveled south to the hill country of Judea, where Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered Elizabeth and Zechariah’s house and spoke, Elizabeth’s baby jumped in her womb. At that moment Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she said to Mary in a raised voice,

“Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the child you will bear!
But why am I so favored,
that the mother of my Lord
should come to me?”

Luke 1:42 NIV

Elizabeth spoke an additional blessing upon Mary, because Mary had believed what the Lord had told her through an angel.

In response to Elizabeth's blessing Mary spoke beautiful words that sound poetic. She said,

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations
will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done
great things for me
--holy is his name.”

Luke 1:46-49 NIV

Mary continued speaking in words (Luke 1:50-55), which remind the reader of the Psalms of David.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth in Judea for about three months before returning to her home in Galilee.

Every mother in the tribe of Judah had hoped that her son would be the Christ (Messiah), and now for Mary, it was coming true. It was for her joy unspeakable! She knew nothing yet of the hurt that His suffering and death would cause her.

Mary is presented in the New Testament as being a very wonderful woman. She was well educated in the Scriptures, devout and holy; but she was, for all that, only a member of the human race, not divine.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever noticed that many baby girls are given the name “Mary?” Why do you think that is so?
2. Do you think Mary did her job well of being the mother to the Christ (Messiah)? What makes you think as you do?
3. Do you think Elizabeth was a help to Mary? In what way was she a help to her?
4. Is Mary ever called in the Holy Scriptures the “Mother of God?” What would you say to a person who said to you that you should pray to Mary?

4.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Matthew 2:1-18; Luke 2:1-39

The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered a census to be taken of the Roman world.

In order for Joseph and Mary to be registered for the census, they had to leave their home in Nazareth and go south to Bethlehem, a distance of about 60 miles. This was because Joseph and Mary belonged to the family of King David and because Bethlehem was “the city of David.”

It was not a good time for Mary to travel, since she was large with child. To complicate matters, when she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, they found the city so overcrowded that there was no room in the inn. So they stayed in an animal shelter. If the inhabitants of Bethlehem had realized that the long-awaited Christ (Messiah) would be born in their city that night, every home would have been open to them.

As it happened, however, Mary gave birth to her firstborn child in a shed where animals were fed. After the baby was born, Mary wrapped Him in cloths and laid him in the animal shelter, possibly, in a feeding trough.

Shepherds were out in a nearby field that night, watching over their flock, when, suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The bright glory of the Lord shone around about them, and they became afraid. The angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid.

I bring you good news of great joy

that will be for all the people.”

Luke 2:10 NIV

What good news was the angel speaking about? The angel explained,

“Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:11 NIV

This was, indeed, good news! The shepherds, like everyone else in Israel, had long been looking for the Christ (Messiah) to be born. The shepherds wanted to see this child, but where could they find Him? The angel directed them, saying,

“This will be a sign to you:
You will find a baby wrapped in cloths
and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:12 NIV

After the angel said this, there appeared with the angel a whole crowd of heavenly warriors, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men
with whom He is pleased.”

Luke 2:14 NASU

These words described aptly what the Christ (Messiah) would accomplish. He would, indeed, glorify God and bring peace among those who want to please God.

After the angels left, the shepherds said to each other,

“Let’s go to Bethlehem
and see this thing that has happened,
which the Lord has told us about.”

Luke 2:15 NIV

The shepherds rushed to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in the animal shelter.

After the shepherds had seen the baby, they spread the news about Him to others. Everyone who heard their story was amazed. As for Mary, she stored up these things in her heart (Luke 2:19).

The shepherds were euphoric that they had seen the baby. As they returned to their flock they were glorifying God and praising Him for all the things they had seen and heard.

When the eighth day came, the baby was circumcised, as the Law of Moses prescribed; and He was given the name “Jesus” (Savior) (Luke 2:21), as the angel had instructed Joseph (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31).

When the forty days that were prescribed by the Law of Moses for Mary’s purification (Leviticus 12:2-6) had passed, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem in order to present Him to the Lord. The Law of Moses said that the first born males of both humans and animals belonged to the Lord (Exodus 13: 2,13,15) and

that they should be purchased from the Lord with a sacrifice. If people were poor, as Joseph and Mary were, the sacrifice was only a pair of doves and two young pigeons (Leviticus 12:8).

While Joseph and Mary were at the temple in Jerusalem, they met a just and devout man named “Simeon.” The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that the Christ would be born during his lifetime and that he would see Him. When Simeon saw Jesus, he took Him up in his arms and said,

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared
in the sight of all people,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Luke 2:29-32 NIV

Notice that Simeon said that Jesus would bring not only glory to the people of Israel, but also light to the Gentiles. Joseph and Mary marveled at what Simeon said. Simeon blessed them and spoke to Mary about the changes that Jesus would bring about in Israel. He said,

“This child is destined to cause
the falling and rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
so that the thoughts of many hearts

will be revealed”

Luke 2:34-35a

Simeon made a another statement, which, no doubt, caused Mary to have great apprehension. He said to her,

“And a sword will pierce
your own soul too.”

Luke 2:35b NIV

There was also an elderly widow present at the temple, a prophetess, named “Anna,” who spent most of her time fasting and praying. She approached Joseph, Mary, and the baby and gave thanks to God. She extolled the baby Jesus as being the Messiah to all that were expecting the Christ (Messiah).

The gospel of Luke gives the impression (Luke 2:39) that Joseph immediately took his little family to Nazareth. Luke, however, may not have intended to imply that Joseph did it immediately, for it seems that from Jerusalem they went back to Bethlehem, where the Wise Men found them. Luke may have thought it was not necessary to tell the story of the Wise Men, because Matthew had already told it.

The question that the Wise Men asked in Jerusalem could hardly have been phrased in a way that would have caused greater consternation. The Wise men asked,

“Where is the one
who has been born king of the Jews?
We saw his star in the east

and have come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:2 NIV

That question was bound to upset the leaders in Jerusalem, for it meant that there was a pretender to the throne. King Herod considered this so serious that he called the chief priest and the teachers of the law together and asked them where the Christ (Messiah) was to be born. They informed Him that the Christ should be born in Bethlehem, and they quoted the words of Micah the prophet, who said,

“But you, Bethlehem,
in the land of Judah,
are by no means least
among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd
of my people Israel.”

Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6 NIV

After King Herod found out where the Messiah should be born, he summoned the Wise Men and asked them when they had first seen the star. Having learned from the wise men the time, King Herod sent them to Bethlehem and told them to report back to him what they found.

After the Wise Men left Jerusalem, they went on their way to Bethlehem, and they were overjoyed that the star led them directly there. Upon arriving, they found Joseph, Mary, and the Child now living in a house. Entering the house, they saw baby Jesus; and falling down before Him,

they worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh to Jesus.

The Wise Men did not return to King Herod, as he has requested, for they had been warned in a dream not to do so. Instead, they returned to their own country without going to Jerusalem.

When King Herod realized that the Wise Men had not followed his instructions, he was furious and gave orders to kill all the boy babies in and around Bethlehem that were two years old and under, counting from the time the Wise Men first saw the star. This caused many mothers in that area to weep, which reminded Matthew, the gospel writer, of what Jeremiah the prophet had said about Ramah (a place near Bethlehem), namely,

“A voice is heard in Ramah
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:18 NIV

Jesus was not among the children that King Herod put to death, for an angel of the Lord had warned Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. How do you suppose Mary traveled to Bethlehem? Do you think she rode an animal, rode in a cart, or walked?

2. Is it disturbing to you to think that the Christ (Messiah) was born in an animal shelter instead of in a palace? Please explain your answer?
3. Does it appear incongruous to you that the angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds? Should not the angel have announced it to someone more important than shepherds?
4. Why do you think the Wise Men bowed down before Baby Jesus and worshipped Him, instead of worshipping Mary, His mother? Why did they present their gifts to Jesus instead of to His parents?
5. Do you see any special significance in the kinds of gifts the Wise Man gave to Jesus? If so, please explain.

5. JESUS AS A BOY Luke 2:40-52

Already as a boy Jesus would have been aware that His name meant “Savior.” He would have been taught in the synagogue, and at home, about the great hero Joshua (or Jesus), who bore that name before Him.

Jesus would also have come to realize, as He read in the Scriptures, that the unusual circumstances surrounding His birth fulfilled a prophecy in the Old Testament, which said,

“The virgin will be with child
and will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel’
--which means, ‘God with us.’”

Matthew 1:23 NIV

Not much is known about Jesus as a boy. We do know a few things, however. He grew up in a little town called Nazareth, which is in the hills west of the Sea of Galilee. We know that the people in Nazareth had a synagogue (Luke 4:16), and it is reasonable to assume that Jesus acquired at Nazareth His life-long habit of going to the Synagogue. We also know that Jesus was able to read (Luke 4:16-19). He may have learned to read at the Synagogue in Nazareth.

In addition, we know also that Jesus made annual trips to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary to celebrate the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41-42). This would suggest that

Jesus' family was faithful to celebrate the other festivals as well.

The New Testament gives some details about a trip that the family made to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. When the Passover Feast was over, Jesus' parents started back for Galilee. They assumed that Jesus was among their friends and relatives. After they had traveled a day, however, they discovered that Jesus was not in their company. So they hastened back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

After three days, they finally found Him at the temple, in the company of teachers of the Law of Moses, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone that overheard His conversation with the teachers was astonished at His questions and answers (Luke 2:47).

His parents were upset when they found Jesus, because He had caused them much inconvenience and concern. Mary did not hesitate to call Jesus to account for His actions. She said to Him,

“Son, why have you treated us like this?
Your father and I
have been anxiously searching for you.”
Luke 2:48 NIV

Jesus replied to Mary and Joseph,

“Why did you seek Me?
Did you not know
that I must be about My Father's business?”
Luke 2:49 NKJV

It is instructive to see that at the age of twelve Jesus already referred to God as, “My Father.” Indeed, the word “Father” became His favorite designation for God. In the Old Testament, God was called “Jahweh,” “Elohim,” “Adonai,” and so forth; but for Jesus, He was simply “Father.”

This suggests that Jesus felt a strong kinship to God. When He said that He must be about His “Father’s business,” He showed that He knew early on that He bore a special responsibility for the things of His Father. His parents, however, did not at that time understand what He meant when He said, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:50).

After this episode, Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents, and He was subject to them, as was proper, and His mother treasured up all His sayings in her heart (Luke 2:51).

Jesus grew up with younger brothers and sisters in the family, for Joseph and Mary had several children together after Jesus was born. His brothers and sisters were aware, no doubt, that Jesus was an unusual boy; but they likely did not grasp the full significance of just how special He was. This is suggested by the fact that they were slow to believe in Him (John 7:5). Indeed, it is not certain that all of His brothers and sisters ever came to believe in Him. Their lack of belief suggests that Jesus did not do any miraculous works as a boy.

Jesus showed at the age of twelve that He was mature beyond His years; yet there is no reason to think that, as He was growing up, He was a mature man in a child’s body. It seems that He had to go through the process of growing up

just as every other child does, for the Gospel of Luke says of Him,

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature,
and in favor with God and men.”

Luke 2:52 NIV

It would be a mistake to think that Jesus did not have to suffer the growing pains that other youngsters suffer, for He was tempted just as every other person is tempted, but He resisted all temptations. The book of Hebrews says,

“For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize
with our weaknesses,
but we have one who has been tempted
in every way, just as we are
--yet was without sin.”

Hebrews 4:15 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think Joseph and Mary told Jesus about the unusual circumstances surrounding His birth? If Jesus knew these things about His birth, how do you think it made Him feel as a boy? Do you think it affected His childhood in any way? Please explain.
2. Was Mary's displeasure with Jesus at the temple justified, or was it not?

3. Do you suppose that Jesus appeared to His brothers and sisters to be unusual in any way? If so, in what way do you suppose He appeared unusual to them?
4. Do you think the people of Nazareth were sympathetic to Jesus when He was growing up?
5. Does the thought disturb you that Jesus, who was so strong and great as an adult, may have been somewhat like other children when He was a child? What do you make of Philippians 2:6-8?

6.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22

When Jesus was about 30 years old (Luke 3:23), and ready to start His public ministry, He did not go down to Jerusalem to seek the advice of the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. He went, instead, out to where John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13), so that John could baptize Him.

John and Jesus were likely acquainted with each other prior to this meeting in the wilderness, for their mothers were friends (Luke 1:36-45). John seemed to know that Jesus was a godly man. It is interesting to watch the interplay between these two holy young men. Jesus approved of John and of his work, otherwise He would not have wanted to be baptized at John's hands.

John, for his part, who had been so bold when confronting theologians, lawyers, and soldiers, seemed almost meek as Jesus stood before him.

At the beginning of their interaction in the wilderness, John had no reason to think that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ), yet he seemed awed by Jesus' goodness; for when Jesus came seeking baptism, John said to Him,

“I need to be baptized by you,
and do you come to me?”

Matthew 3:14 NIV

John's hesitancy to baptize Jesus is understandable. He must have asked himself, “Why did Jesus need to be

baptized?” Jesus, however, insisted that John baptize Him; and John was persuaded after Jesus convinced him that it was the right thing to do, by saying,

“Let it be so now;
it is proper for us to do this
to fulfill all righteousness.”

Matthew 3:15 NIV

In compliance with Jesus’ request, John baptized (immersed) Jesus, in the Jordan River. (To “baptize” means to “immerse.”)

After Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water praying (Luke 3:21). While He was praying, the heavens open up (Mark 1:10) and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22) and alighted upon Him (Matthew 3:16). Both Jesus and John saw it happen. In addition, there was a voice that spoke from heaven, saying,

“This is My beloved Son,
in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17 NKJV

You will recall that at the age of twelve, Jesus had called God “my Father” (Luke 2:49); and now, at Jesus’ baptism, God called Jesus “my beloved Son.”

The voice that sounded from heaven testified to three things: (1) Jesus is God’s Son, (2) God loves Jesus, and (3) God is “well pleased” with Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus, His natural kinship with God was overlaid with God’s Holy Spirit, so

that He was, afterwards, doubly prepared to meet the challenges that lay before Him: He was God's Son by birth and was endowed with God's Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus not begin His public ministry before He got baptized? What do you think?
2. Why do you suppose it was that Jesus wanted John, and not someone else, to baptize Him?
3. Why did John hesitate to baptize Jesus? Can you suggest some possible reasons?
4. How did John's baptizing Jesus "fulfill all righteousness?" Matthew 3:15.
5. Do you get the impression that Jesus thought baptism was important? What is your understanding of why He thought it was important? Is it important today? If Jesus had not been baptized, do you think people today would consider baptism to be important?
6. Why did the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus after His baptism instead of before it? What do you think?
7. If a person is baptized today, does that person's baptism symbolize anything? If so, what does it symbolize? See Romans 6:1-4. Is baptism more than a symbol?

7.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

Shortly after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness so that Satan (the devil) could tempt him there. Remember that Jesus was already “filled with the Holy Spirit” before the ordeal of His temptations began (Luke 4:1).

For forty days and forty nights Jesus was out in the wilderness with the animals (Mark 1:13). During that time He ate nothing at all. He may have drunk a little water (but the text does not say that He did), and all the while Satan was tempting Him (Luke 4:2).

At the end of the forty days, Jesus became very hungry. It was then that Satan, the tempter, said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3 NIV).

Jesus found Himself in a situation that reminded Him of the children of Israel in the wilderness when they did not know what they would eat, and God provided “manna” for them. Jesus recalled what Moses had written, and Jesus said to Satan,

“It is written:

‘Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word
that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV

In this way, Jesus used Scripture to counter temptation, but Satan was not finished with Jesus. He took Him to Jerusalem and stood Him on a high point of the temple area and said to Him,

“If you are the Son of God,
throw yourself down.

For it is written:

‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’
and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

Matthew 4:6; Psalm 91:11-12 NKJV

With these words Satan showed that he, too, could quote Scripture, but he misapplied the passage; for Psalm 91 (from which Satan quoted) speaks to people in physical danger, but Jesus was in no physical danger. The only danger He faced was that He might listen to Satan and do something foolish in order to test (and show) whether or not God would protect Him from the consequences of what He did.

This second temptation reminded Jesus of a comment that Moses had made concerning the time when the children of Israel were in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 17:1-7) and demanded that Moses give them water. Jesus quoted Moses’ comment, namely,

“Do not put the Lord your God
to the test.”

Matthew 4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16 NIV

Satan tempted Jesus in yet another way. He took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. No longer did Satan go through the charade of saying, “If you are the Son of God.” He went right to the point. He wanted Jesus to worship him in the same way that Jesus worshipped God. So he said to Jesus,

“I will give you all their [the world’s]
authority and splendor,
for it has been given to me,
and I can give it to anyone I want to.
So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”

Luke 4:6-7 NIV

It is doubtful that Satan could actually deliver all that he promised, or that he would even try. If it were true, however, that Satan could give Jesus control over all earthly authority, it would enable Jesus to accomplish many of His goals and do it with much less pain and suffering to Himself. Jesus, however, did not fall for it.

Satan’s proposal reminded Jesus of the temptation that the children of Israel faced when they were told that if they would fall down before foreign gods (idols) and worship them, things would go better for them.

This time, Satan had gone too far. Jesus was fed up with him and with his temptations. He said,

“Away with you, Satan!
For it is written,
‘You shall worship the Lord your God,

and Him only you shall serve.””

Matthew 4:10; Deuteronomy 6:13 NKJV

Jesus had passed the test. He had proved that He could eat food or not eat, as God provided. He had proved that He would not use His miraculous power for personal convenience or for show. He had also proved that He did not aspire to become a political ruler in the world.

So Satan left off tempting Jesus, until another time; and angels came and took care of Jesus (Matthew 4:11).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you suppose it was that the Holy Spirit led Jesus away into a desert place to be tempted? Why in a desert place? What do you think?
2. Why did the Holy Spirit wait until after Jesus was baptized before He led Jesus out to be tempted?
3. Why did not God do the testing Himself, rather than turn it over to Satan? See James 1:13-15.
4. Do you think it was hard for Jesus to resist these temptations? Please explain.
5. Do you get the idea that Jesus' familiarity with the Scriptures helped Him in the time of temptation? Would a familiarity with Scriptures (both Old and New Testaments) help us in time of temptation?

6. Have you ever been tempted to think that God would not take care of you? Please, tell about it, if you feel free to do so.

8. ENDORSEMENT BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

John 1:6-9,15, 19-36

Many common people were wondering whether or not John the Baptist were the Christ (Messiah). The religious leaders in Jerusalem were wondering that, too; and they sent some of the priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John to find out whether or not He was the Christ. They knew that John would tell them the truth.

John was baptizing near Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River and emissaries from Jerusalem came and asked him if he were the Christ, and John said,

“I am not the Christ”

John 1:20

The priests and Levites asked, “Who are you then? Are you Elijah?”

John said, “I am not.”

They asked, “Are you ‘the Prophet?’”

He answered, “No.”

Then they asked, “Who are you? Tell us so that we can give an answer to those that sent us. What do you say for yourself?”

John replied with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, which said,

“I am the voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

John 1:23 NIV; Isaiah 40:3

The emissaries that had been sent by the Pharisees asked John, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

John explained that there was a man, whom they did not know, and that this man was greater than he (John). John said,

“I baptize with water,
but among you stands one you do not know.
He is the one who comes after me,
the thongs of whose sandals
I am not worthy to untie.”

John 1:26-27

The next day after John had said these words, Jesus came walking by where John was baptizing; and John saw Him and said of Jesus,

“Look, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 1:29 NIV

Then John added,

“This is the one I meant when I said,
‘A man who comes after me
has surpassed me
because he was before me.’”

John 1:30 NIV

In this manner, John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Christ (Messiah).

John explained that he had, at first, not known that Jesus was the Christ. John said,

“I myself did not know him [the Christ],
but the reason I came baptizing with water
was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

John 1:31 NIV

Only after John saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, did he realize that Jesus was the Christ. John said,

“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven
as a dove and remain on him.”

John 1:32 NIV

Indeed, John might not have recognized that Jesus was the Christ, if God had not previously said to him,

“The man on whom you see
the Spirit come down and remain
is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”

John 1:33b NIV

Still referring to Jesus, John said to the people that were standing around,

“I have seen and I testify
that this is the Son of God.”

John 1:34 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. How did the fact that John was baptizing people help reveal the Messiah to Israel?
2. Do you think that John the Baptist was surprised that Jesus turned out to be the Messiah? Please explain.
3. Do you think that John the Baptist was in a position to know whether Jesus was the Messiah or not? Was John's testimony about Jesus clear and understandable? Was his testimony convincing? Was it reliable?
4. Did Jesus place value on John's testimony? Please read John 5:31-36.
5. Do you see any evidence that John the Baptist established his own church?

9. JESUS' FIRST FOLLOWERS John 1:35-51

Two of John the Baptist's disciples heard John say that Jesus was the "Lamb of God," and they started following Jesus. When Jesus turned around and saw the two following Him, He asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi (Teacher), where are you staying?"

He said "Come and you will see."

This was the first invitation, so far as we know, that Jesus issued to anyone to follow Him. These two men went with Jesus, saw where He was staying, and spent the rest of the day with Him.

One of the two men was Andrew, who had a brother named Simon. The first thing Andrew did, after finding Jesus, was to go to his brother, Simon, and tell him, "We have found the Messiah (Christ)!" Thus, Andrew led Simon to Jesus.

Jesus, who was always quick to size up a person's true character, said to Simon the moment He laid eyes on him,

"You are Simon son of John.
You will be called Cephas."

John 1:42 NIV

Jesus saw something rock-like in Simon's character, so He called him "Cephas," which in Aramaic means "rock." ("Peter" is a Greek word for "rock.") Jesus was the one who gave Simon the name "Peter."

The next day, Jesus wanted to leave the area where John was baptizing and return to Galilee. Before He left, however, He ran into a man named Philip, and He said to Philip, “Follow me.”

Philip was from the town of Bethsaida, at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. (Peter, Andrew, and Philip were from the same town.)

Philip was quick to figure out that Jesus was the Messiah. As a result of his having figured out who Jesus was, Philip went looking for his friend Nathanael. When he found Nathanael, he said to him,

“We have found the one
Moses wrote about in the Law,
and about whom the prophets also wrote-
Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

John 1:45 NIV

Philip’s words show that he knew what the Old Testament said about the Messiah, for he identified Jesus as being the one (Messiah) about whom Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18) and the Prophets had written. Philip’s words also show that Philip expected his friend Nathanael to know what the Old Testament said about the Messiah.

Yet when Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he was skeptical. He did not think highly of the little town of Nazareth. Also, he likely knew that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:4-6), not at Nazareth. So Nathanael said,

“Nazareth!

Can anything good come from there?"

John 1:46

In response to Nathanael's skepticism, Philip insisted,

"Come and see."

John 1: 46

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, Jesus said,

"Here is a true Israelite,
in whom there is nothing false."

John 1:47 NIV

Nathanael was amazed that Jesus could size up his character so quickly and so well. So he asked Jesus, "How do you know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael knew that it could only have been by a miracle that Jesus had seen him. Therefore, Jesus' words convinced Nathanael that Jesus was, indeed, the one about of whom Moses and the Prophets had written; so Nathanael declared,

"Rabbi, you are the Son of God;
you are the King of Israel."

John 1:49 NIV

With this statement, Nathanael revealed that he, too, had great understanding of the Old Testament, for Philip had said nothing to him, so far as we know, about Jesus'

being either “the Son of God” or “the King of Israel.” Philip had only said that Jesus was the one about whom Moses and the Prophets had written. Nathanael had deduced the rest; and Nathanael was right, for if Jesus were the one about whom Moses and the Prophets had written, then He was also “the Son of God” and “the King of Israel.”

Jesus said to Nathanael,

“You believe because I told you
I saw you under the fig tree.
You shall see greater things than that.”

John 1:50 NIV

Then Jesus added,

“I tell you the truth,
you shall see heaven open,
and the angels of God ascending
and descending on the Son of Man.”

John 1:51 NIV

With this Jesus made reference to the ladder that Jacob, their forefather, had seen in a dream (Genesis 28:12), upon which angels commuted between heaven and earth. Jesus knew that He Himself would also be a link between heaven and earth.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What was the first thing Andrew did after he got acquainted with Jesus? See John 1:41. Is Andrew's action an example for us in any way? If so, in what way?
2. Do you think angels are still commuting between heaven and earth? Does God still send angels to help His people? See Hebrews 1:14.
3. Why did Jesus want Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael to "follow" Him? What did He have in mind for them?

10.
THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA
John 2:1-11

After Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist and tempted by Satan, Jesus returned to Galilee. One of the first things He did when He got back to Galilee was to attend a wedding feast at a place called Cana. Cana is thought to have been located between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea.

Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding feast, as was His mother, Mary.

Mary felt responsible that things went well at the wedding feast. So when the wine ran out, she said to Jesus, “They have no wine.” Jesus, however, did not seem to think it was His or His mother’s responsibility to be concerned about the wine. He said to her,

“Woman,
what does that have to do with us?”

John 2:4a NASB

Jesus addressed His mother as, “Woman,” which sounds gruff to us; but it may have been nothing more than a playful response on His part.

Jesus seems to have thought that His mother was asking Him to perform a miracle, for He said to her,

“My time has not yet come.”

John 2:4b NIV

Yet, in spite of the fact that it might rush His schedule to perform a miracle so early in His career, Jesus allowed His love for His mother to influence His timetable.

Mary was, doubtless, accustomed to relying upon Jesus, her eldest son. She seemed to know that He would do something about the shortage of wine, so she said to those that were serving,

“Do whatever he tells you.”

John 2:5 NIV

Now, there were six stone jars standing around, which held water for ritual washing. Each of these jars held twenty to thirty gallons of water. Jesus told the servers, “Fill up the jars with water,” and they filled them up. Then He told them to dip out some of the water and take it to the banquet master.

They did as Jesus had said, and the banquet master tasted it, not realizing where it had come from. The servers, however, knew where it had come from. Then the banquet master took the bridegroom aside and said to him,

“Everyone brings out the choice wine first
and then the cheaper wine
after the guests have had too much to drink;
but you have saved the best till now.”

John 2:10 NIV

This was Jesus’ first miraculous sign. It showed His glory and caused His disciples to believe in Him all the more (John 2:11).

Not long after the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum and stayed there a while. His mother and His brothers went with Him. His disciples went with Him as well (John 2:12).

Capernaum was below the level of the Mediterranean Sea, and it was a pleasant place to spend the winter. It is comforting to think that Jesus began His ministry in a pleasant and leisurely fashion, before the rush of events overtook Him.

As spring came, however, when it was almost time for the Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem (John 2:13), as had been His custom since childhood.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Are you surprised that the first thing that Jesus did in Galilee was to attend a wedding? What does that tell you about Jesus' view of marriage?
2. Are you surprised that Jesus performed His first miracle at His mother's request? What does that tell you about His relationship with His mother?
3. Are you surprised that Jesus' first miracle was to make wine for a wedding feast? Does that tell you anything about His appreciation for the importance of joy?
4. Are you surprised that the wine that Jesus made was of the finest quality? What can we learn from that?

11. JESUS CLEARED OUT THE TEMPLE

John 2:13-25

Jesus' evangelistic work in Galilee had hardly begun before it was time for Him to make His annual trip to Jerusalem for the Passover.

When He got to Jerusalem, He went up to the temple grounds. There, Jesus, the quiet teacher from Galilee, was incensed at what He saw: People were selling cattle, sheep, and doves within the temple complex.

There was probably no law prohibiting the selling of animals and birds on the temple grounds, but Jesus found it unacceptable; for the sellers were making merchandise out of religion and doing it at the most sacred place in the nation. What was worse, there were moneychangers sitting at tables, ready to exchange local coins for foreign coins, because foreign coins could not be used at the temple.

Jesus did not bother to complain to the priests. That would have done no good, for the priests no doubt profited from the selling of animals and the exchanging of money.

So Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the sheep and cattle from the temple area and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins.

He said to the people that sold doves,

“Take these things away!
Do not make My Father's house
a house of merchandise!”

John 2:16 NKJV

Jesus was very protective of the temple, which He considered to be His Father's house.

Much later, Jesus' disciples remembered that it was written of Him in the Psalms,

“Zeal for your house
will consume me.”

John 2:17 NIV; Psalm 69:9

Jesus' actions got the attention of the people. They perceived that His driving the animals out and His overturning the tables of the moneychangers was a religious and symbolical act, something like what a prophet might do. So they demanded of Jesus,

“What sign do you show to us,
since you do these things?”

John 2:18 NKJV

Jesus responded with an enigmatic prophecy. He said,

“Destroy this temple,
and I will raise it again in three days.”

John 2:19 NIV

Jesus knew, of course, that those people would not understand the significance of His enigmatic remark, but He was not ready to explain to them what His mission was. His words show us, however, that He already saw the dark clouds that hung over His mission and the rosy dawn that would follow.

The people ridiculed Jesus' words, saying, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"

The apostle John, who recorded this conversation, explained the Jesus was not referring to the temple but to His own body (John 2:21).

The apostle John also recorded (John 2:22) that Jesus' disciples recalled this prophecy after Jesus was raised from the dead and that it caused them (all the more) to believe the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

There were many people present in Jerusalem for that Passover Feast, and they saw the signs that Jesus did, and many of them believed on His name (John 2:23); but Jesus did not fully trust any of them; because He knew what kind of people they were (John 2:24-25).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus drive the animals out of the temple grounds and overturned the tables of the moneychangers? Was He making a statement by doing this? What statement do you think He was making?
2. Do you find it uncharacteristic of Jesus that He made a whip and drove the animals from the temple? Does it suggest to you that Jesus condoned violence? Did Jesus hit any persons with his little whip?
3. Do you suppose that the moneychangers had a hard time identifying their coins and getting their coins back together after Jesus overturned their tables? Do you

think it angered the moneychangers? Do you suppose it angered the priests? Do you think that Jesus cared whether it angered them or not?

4. Do you think some people respected Jesus all the more because He tried to stop the desecration of the temple? Do you suppose many people in Jerusalem were talking about what He did?

12.
NICODEMUS
John 3:1-21

While Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover, a man named Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus by night, and said,

“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

John 3:2 NIV

In reply, Jesus went right to the heart of the problem that the Pharisees had. Unless they changed the way they thought and the way they lived, they could not participate in the kingdom of God. Jesus said to Nicodemus,

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

John 3:3 NIV

Nicodemus was a literal-minded man. He asked,

“How can a man be born when he is old?”

John 3:4 NIV

Nicodemus added, “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born” (John 3:4 NIV)!

Jesus ignored Nicodemus’ sarcasm, but answered his question by explaining that two things are involved in being born again: They are water and Spirit. Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth,
no one can enter the kingdom of God
unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

John 3:5 NIV

The “water” of which Jesus here spoke is baptism. How could it be anything else? John the Baptist had been prescribing baptism, and Jesus would Himself shortly prescribe it in the Judean countryside (John 3:22).

The Pharisees, however, were resisting John the Baptist’s efforts to get them into the water for baptism. They resisted because they rejected God’s purpose for themselves (Luke 7:29-30).

Yet the new birth involves more than being immersed in water. A birth “of the Spirit” is also necessary (John 3:5).

Jesus explained that when a person is born of the Spirit, he or she takes on the nature of the Spirit. Jesus said,

“Flesh gives birth to flesh,
but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
You should not be surprised
at my saying,
‘You must be born again.’”

John 3:6-7 NIV

It was only natural that Jesus should compare the Spirit to the wind, for in the Hebrew language the word for both “Spirit” and “wind” is the same word. (This is true in Greek, too.) Jesus said,

“The wind blows wherever it pleases.
You hear its sound,
but you cannot tell
where it comes from or where it is going.
So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8 NIV

Just as no one can figure out in advance precisely how the wind will blow, so no one can figure out, by using his own intellect, what God’s Spirit requires. A person must let God teach him.

This was very puzzling to Nicodemus, and he expressed some doubt about it all. He asked, “How can this be?”

Nicodemus’ long-standing acquaintance with the Old Testament should have equipped him to understand what Jesus meant. Jesus asked him,

“Are you the teacher of Israel,
and do not know these things?”

John 3:10 NKJV

Jesus chided Nicodemus for not believing His message. Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth,

we speak of what we know,
and we testify to what we have seen,
but still you people do not accept
our testimony.”

John 3:11 NIV

What Jesus had said to Nicodemus so far had dealt
with things that transpire on earth things. Jesus said,

“I have spoken to you of earthly things
and you do not believe.”

John 3:12a NIV

Then Jesus asked,

“How then will you believe
if I speak of heavenly things?”

John 3:12b NIV

Jesus assured Nicodemus that He (Jesus) was amply
qualified to tell him of heavenly things. Jesus said,

“No one has ever gone into heaven
except the one who came from heaven
-the Son of Man.”

John 3:13 NIV

Then Jesus told Nicodemus a secret that He had not
been sharing with everyone. He said,

“Just as Moses lifted up
the snake in the desert,

so the Son of Man must be lifted up,
that everyone who believes in him
may have eternal life.”

John 3:14-15 NIV

With these words, Jesus compared Himself to the bronze snake that was lifted up in the desert, and which brought healing to the people of Israel (Numbers 21:8-9). In this way Jesus made reference to His own death.

It is not certain that the following passage (John 3:16-21) was spoken by Jesus. The apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, may have written it. Irrespective of whether Jesus or John framed the following words, they are true and precious. The passage says,

“For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him
shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 NIV

The passage goes on to say that God did not send His Son into the world to judge (condemn) the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17). The person that believes in the Son will not be judged (condemned); but the person that does not believe is judged (condemned) already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:18).

The passage also tells why some people do not come to Jesus' light. It is because, although light has come into the world, they love darkness rather than the light; for their

works are evil (John 3:19). Everyone that does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be reproved (John 3:20). The person, however, that acts according to truth comes to the light, in order that his works be shown to have been done in God (John 3:21).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. In what way was Jesus' death on the cross (John 3:14-15) like the snake that was lifted up in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8-9)?
2. Do you think Nicodemus was influenced by his conversation with Jesus? See John 7:50 and John 19:39.
3. Did Jesus imply (in John 3:5) that no one can enter the kingdom of God without water baptism?
4. Did Jesus imply that no one can enter the kingdom of God without a rebirth of (or from) the Spirit?
5. Did Jesus link water baptism and the birth of the Spirit? What do you think?
6. Please quote from memory John 3:16, if you can.

13.

JOHN THE BAPTIST ENDORSED JESUS AGAIN

John 3:22-36

Jesus and His disciples left the city of Jerusalem after the Passover and went into the surrounding countryside of Judea, where they spent a few days (John 3:22).

Jesus was teaching and baptizing people (John 3:22), as John the Baptist was doing. Jesus did not baptize people with His own hands, however. He let His disciples do that (John 4:2).

Meanwhile, John the Baptist was baptizing at a place called Aenon, near Salim on the Jordan River. He was baptizing at that place because a lot of water was there (John 3:23), and people were coming to him and being baptized.

While John was at Aenon, a controversy arose between John's disciples and other people over certain purification rites. John's disciples came to him with their questions; and in the course of their conversation, John's disciples remarked to him,

“Rabbi, He who was with you
beyond the Jordan,
to whom you have testified--
behold,
He is baptizing,
and all are coming to Him!”

John 3:26 NKJV

John's disciples seemed concerned that Jesus was becoming more popular than John; but John showed no

jealousy. He was glad that people were coming to Jesus. He replied,

“A man can receive
only what is given him from heaven.
You yourselves can testify that I said,
‘I am not the Christ
but am sent ahead of him.’”

John 3:27-28 NIV

John compared himself to the friend of a bridegroom. He said,

“The bride belongs to the bridegroom.
The friend who attends the bridegroom
waits and listens for him,
and is full of joy when he hears
the bridegroom’s voice.
That joy is mine,
and it is now complete.”

John 3:29 NIV

John knew that Jesus would eclipse him. John said,

“He must become greater;
I must become less.”

John 3:30 NIV

The verses that follow in the Gospel of John sound like the words of the apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, instead of the words of John the Baptist.

The verses (John 3:31-36) assert that Jesus, who came from above, is above all. In contrast to this, a person from the earth is earthy and speaks things of the earth (John 3:31). Jesus, on the other hand, came to testify to what He had seen and heard (in heaven); but (almost) no one was accepting His testimony (John 3:32).

The person, however, who does accept Jesus' testimony places his stamp that God is true (John 3:33).

We know that Jesus, whom God sent, speaks the words of God, for God does not dole out His Spirit by measure (John 3:34); for the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand (John 3:35).

The person that believes in the Son has eternal life, but the person that disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him (John 3:36).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did John the Baptist think of Jesus? Do you consider that John the Baptist was a generous and unassuming man? If so, why?
2. If a person does not have faith in Jesus, is it his lack of faith that condemns him, or do his sins condemn him?
3. Why do you suppose it was that Jesus did not baptize people with His own hands?
4. Why do you suppose it is that the wrath of God (John 3:36) remains on people who do not believe in Jesus?

14. THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

John 4:1-26

While in Judea, Jesus became aware that the Pharisees had learned that He was making more disciples and baptizing more people than John the Baptist. This, apparently, played a role in Jesus' decision to break off His work in Judea and postpone it until later (John 4:1-2).

Another reason why Jesus left Judea at this time was that He had heard that John the Baptist had been arrested and put into prison (Mark 1:14). So from this point on, the responsibility for announcing the approach of the kingdom of God rested on Jesus' shoulders.

In order to reach Galilee, however, Jesus and His disciples passed through Samaria. In the course of their journey, they came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, where Jacob's well was.

Jesus was weary from the journey and sat down by the well to rest while His disciples went into town to buy food.

About noontime a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, and Jesus asked her, "Will you give me a drink?"

This shocked the woman, for she recognized that Jesus belonged to the children of Israel, who customarily did not speak to Samaritans. She said, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How is it you ask me for a drink?"

Jesus replied,

"If you knew the gift of God
and who it is that asks you for a drink,

you would have asked him
and he would have given you living water.”
John 4:10 NIV

The woman observed that Jesus did not have anything with which to bring water up from the well, and she knew the well was deep; so she asked Him, “Where do you get this ‘living water’” (John 4:11)? (The expression “living water” can also mean fresh, running water.)

Then the woman asked, “Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds” (John 4:12 NIV)?

Jesus did not respond to her affirmation that Jacob was the father of the Samaritans. Instead, He persisted with His water analogy, and said,

“Everyone who drinks this water
will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks the water I give him
will never thirst.”

John 4:13-14a NIV

Then Jesus added,

“Indeed, the water I give him
will become in him a spring of water
welling up to eternal life.”

John 4:14b NIV

The woman may not have understood the full significance of what Jesus said. She got the idea that she

would not have to come to the well anymore to get water if she had the water of which Jesus spoke. That appealed to her; so she said, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Even though the woman was thinking about her own convenience, she had asked Jesus for help; and her request gave Him an opportunity to help her, although not in the way that she expected. He said to her,

“Go, call your husband and come back.”

John 4:16 NIV

She replied, “I have no husband.”

Her honesty allowed Jesus to intervene in her life even more. He said,

“You are right when you say
you have no husband.

The fact is, you have had five husbands,
and the man you now have
is not your husband.

What you have just said is quite true.”

John 4:17-18 NIV

The woman was stunned that Jesus knew personal facts about her. What is more, He laid His finger on the central problem of her life. She replied,

“Sir, I can see
that you are a prophet.

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain,
but you Jews claim that the place
where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

John 4:19-20 NIV

Jesus had deftly opened her heart, so that she asked for His thoughts on a central point of contention between the Samaritans and the children of Israel. Now that her heart was open, He said to her,

“Believe me, woman,
a time is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain
nor in Jerusalem.”

John 4:21 NIV

If the proper place to worship was neither Samaria nor Jerusalem, then where was it? Jesus explained,

“You Samaritans worship
what you do not know;
we worship what we do know,
for salvation is from the Jews.
Yet a time is coming and has now come
when the true worshipers will worship the
Father in spirit and truth, for they are the
kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

John 4:22-23 NIV

From this it is clear that Jesus looked at worship in a new way. For Him, the place where one worshipped was not as important as that worship should be done in spirit and according to truth. Jesus explained, further,

“God is spirit,
and his worshipers must worship
in spirit and in truth.”

John 4:24 NIV

All of this confused the woman. She was well informed, however, on one point. She knew that when the Messiah (Christ) came, He would explain all of this (John 4:25).

The awakening of the woman’s interest in spiritual truth led Jesus to confide in her that He was the Messiah. He said,

“I who speak to you am he.”

John 4:26 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think the religious leaders of the Samaritans would have thought about Jesus’ statement (John 4:21) that the time would come in which the worship of God would not be centered at a place in Samaria?
2. What do you think the religious leaders of the children of Israel would have thought about Jesus’ statement (John

4:21) that the time would come in which the worship of God would no longer be centered at Jerusalem?

3. What would you say to someone who told you that people should worship God in only one particular city or in one particular kind of building?
4. What did Jesus mean when He said that people should worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)?

15.
MANY SAMARITANS BELIEVED
John 4:27-43

When Jesus' disciples, who had been in the town buying food, returned to the well, they found Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman, and they were surprised; but no one asked Him why He was talking with her.

The woman, meanwhile, left her water jar standing at the well, and rushed back into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ" (John 4:29 NIV).

While the people were coming out of the town, Jesus' disciples urged Him to eat something, but He said to them,

"I have food to eat
that you know nothing about."

John 4:32 NIV

The disciples supposed that Jesus meant that someone had brought Him something to eat, so He explained to them,

"My food is to do the will of Him
who sent Me,
and to finish His work."

John 4:34 NKJV

Jesus expanded on this by giving His disciples a lesson about the urgency of "harvesting" people for the kingdom of God. He said,

“Do you not say,
‘There are still four months
and then comes the harvest’?
Behold, I say to you,
lift up your eyes and look at the fields,
for they are already white for harvest!”

John 4:35 NKJV

The joy that Jesus was experiencing was a part of His reward for the work He was doing. He said,

“Even now the reaper draws his wages,
even now he harvests the crop
for eternal life,
so that the sower and the reaper
may be glad together.
Thus the saying
‘One sows and another reaps’
is true.”

John 4:36-37 NIV

Jesus realized, of course, that He was not the first one to teach good things. Moses and the Prophets and others had gone before Him. They had prepared the way for the work that He and His disciples were doing and would be doing in the future. He said to them,

“I sent you to reap
what you have not worked for.
Others have done the hard work,
and you have reaped the benefits

of their labor.”

John 4:38 NIV

Many Samaritans started believing in Jesus because of what the woman said; and many more came to believe in Him because of what He Himself said to them. They said to the woman,

“We no longer believe
just because of what you said;
now we have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this man really is
the Savior of the world.”

John 4:42 NIV

As a result, they asked Jesus to stay a while with them; and He stayed there two days.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think Jesus’ “food” was, of which He spoke and about which His disciples knew nothing (John 4:34)?
2. What caused the Samaritan woman to start believing in Jesus? What caused the Samaritans from the town to believe in Him?
3. Is reaping a harvest of souls for the kingdom of heaven a rewarding experience? If it is rewarding, in what way is it rewarding?

16.

JESUS' RETURN TO GALILEE and HIS FIRST REJECTION AT NAZARETH

Luke 4:14-30; John 4:43-45

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been arrested (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14), He returned to Galilee.

Prior to His returning, Jesus had been in Jerusalem, as you will recall, where He drove the merchants out of the temple. It was also at Jerusalem that Jesus taught Nicodemus in a private conversation.

After leaving Jerusalem, Jesus spent a few days teaching in the Judean countryside. Then, on His way back to Galilee, He taught the Samaritan woman at the well and stayed two days with the Samaritans.

The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” and that the news about Him spread throughout the whole countryside (Luke 4:14). The Galileans welcomed Him, because many of them had been in Jerusalem at the Passover and had seen all that He had done there (John 4:45).

One of the first places Jesus visited upon His return to Galilee was Nazareth, where He was raised. At Nazareth He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom.

In the synagogue, an attendant brought Him the book (scroll) that contained the words of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus opened the book and read aloud the passage that says,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the
prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:18-19 NIV; Isaiah 61:1-2a

When Jesus finished reading, He closed the book and returned it to the attendant and sat down; and all the people in the synagogue stared at Him. They were well aware that He had just read a prophecy about the Messiah; and they were, no doubt, curious to know whether or not He would confirm the rumor that He was Himself the Messiah. What He said was,

“Today this scripture is fulfilled
in your hearing.”

Luke 4:21 NIV

This amounted to a confirmation that He was, indeed, the Messiah.

At first the people at Nazareth were enthralled with His graceful words; but, for some reason, their sentiments changed. They asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

Jesus knew what they were thinking. He knew that they were hoping He would perform a miracle, as He had done in other places, so He said to them,

“Surely you will quote this proverb to me:
‘Physician, heal yourself!
Do here in your hometown what we have
heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

Luke 4:23 NIV

Then Jesus said,

“Assuredly, I say to you,
no prophet is accepted in his own country.

Luke 4:24 NKJV

Judging by what Jesus said next, the people at Nazareth must have been extremely loyal to their town and to their nation. They must have thought that Jesus’ words were a slap at them. Whatever they thought, Jesus sought to counter their local pride by saying,

“I assure you that
there were many widows in Israel
in Elijah’s time,
when the sky was shut for three
and a half years
and there was a severe famine
throughout the land.
Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them,
but to a widow in Zarephath
in the region of Sidon.”

Luke 4:25-26 NIV

With these words Jesus referred to Elijah the prophet, who had been sent to a widow in a foreign place to bless her with his presence and with food (1 Kings 17:8-16).

If His words so far did not please the people of Nazareth, His next statement pleased them even less. He said,

“And there were many in Israel
with leprosy
in the time of Elisha the prophet,
yet not one of them was cleansed
-only Naaman the Syrian.”

Luke 4:27 NIV

Jesus here referred to the fact that Naaman, a foreign general, was cleansed of Leprosy in the time of Elisha (2 Kings 5:14).

These statements caused the people of Nazareth to get so mad that they rose up and pushed Jesus out of the town.

They forced Him to the brow of the hill on which the town stood. They intended to throw Him down the precipice; but, as if by a miracle, He walked right through the midst of them and went on His way.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. In what way did Jesus' fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2? Did the fact that He fulfilled the prophecy identify Him as the Messiah?

2. Why did it not rain for a long time in Israel in the days of Elijah? What do you think? See 1 Kings 16:30; and 1 Kings 17:1 and its following verses.
3. Why was only Naaman the Syrian healed of leprosy in the days of Elisha? What do you think? See 2 Kings 5:1 and its following verses.
4. Please describe how you think that Jesus felt about the people of Israel? Did He love them? Was He a zealot for their nationalistic cause, or was He equally concerned about the welfare of all peoples around the world?

17.**HEALING OF A ROYAL OFFICER'S SON and
JESUS' MOVE TO CAPERNAUM**

Matthew 4:13-16; Luke 4:31-32; John 4:46-54

After Jesus got back to back to Galilee, one of the places He visited was Cana (John 4:46), where He had made water into wine.

Now, a certain royal officer, likely an Israelite in the service of the king, had a son that lay sick at Capernaum. The man had heard that Jesus had returned to Galilee from Judea and came to Cana to intercept Him (John 4:46). When the man found Jesus, he asked Him to come down to Capernaum and heal his son, saying that his son was so sick that he was about to die.

Jesus tested the man's faith by rebuffing Him. Jesus said, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you do not believe."

However, the rebuff did not deter the man from seeking Jesus' aid. He urged Jesus, saying, "Sir, come down before my son dies."

Jesus gave the man an unexpected reply. He said, "Go, your son lives."

The man had enough faith to take Jesus' word for it and he left. As the man was going down to Capernaum, his servants met him and told him that his son was alive. Then, the royal officer asked them when it was that his son had begun to recover. They told him that the fever left him on the previous day, at about the seventh hour.

The royal officer knew that this was the time that Jesus had said to him, “Your son lives,” and he began to believe in Jesus. His whole house believed also.

This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed after returning to Galilee (John 4:54). The fact that it was only Jesus’ second miraculous sign shows that it took place rather soon after He returned to Galilee.

When Jesus got to Capernaum, He began to teach in the synagogue there on the Sabbath days (Luke 4:41), and Capernaum became His new home (Matthew 4:13). His mother and brothers may have been living at Capernaum, also (John 2:12).

Matthew (who wrote the gospel of Matthew) found that Jesus’ move to Capernaum fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, in which “Zebulun” and “Naphtali” were mentioned. (Zebulun was the general area that lay between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. Naphtali was the area north and west of the Sea of Galilee.) Isaiah had said,

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea,
along the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles-
the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land
of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”

Matthew 4:15-16 NIV; Isaiah 9:1-2

These early days in the ministry of Jesus were a wonderful time in His life. He was young and dynamic; and although people were anxious to hear Him speak, crowds were not surrounding Him from dawn to dusk, as was later the case.

Many people were astonished at His teaching, because He delivered His messages with authority (Luke 4:32). He backed up His teaching with quotations from the Old Testament, where it was appropriate to do so; but He did not try to substantiate what He said with quotations from the Rabbis.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Does Jesus appear to have been anxious to help the royal officer?
2. Did it make any difference whether or not Jesus was present with a sick person in order to heal him? Do you see a difference between the way that Jesus healed and the way in which modern (so-called) “faith healers” (purport to) heal?
3. Did the healing of the royal officer’s son depend upon the son’s having faith that he could be healed? If it did not depend upon the sons’ having faith, then upon what (or whom) did the son’s healing depend?
4. Why did Jesus leave Nazareth and move to Capernaum? What do you think?

5. What was the “light” that was beginning to shine in the land of Galilee (Matthew 4:15)? What was the significance of the “light?”

18.
THE PRELIMINARY CALL OF THE FOUR and
THE CASTING OUT A DEMON

Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-28; Luke 4:31-37

After Jesus moved to Capernaum, He was walking one day along the shore of the nearby Sea of Galilee and saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting nets into the Sea. Jesus was already acquainted with these two men (John 1:40-42). He said to them,

“Come after me,
and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19

Simon Peter and Andrew left their nets at once and began to follow Jesus.

Jesus went along the seashore and saw two other brothers. They were James and John, who were also in the fishing business. They were in a boat with their father, Zabedee, repairing nets.

Jesus called them and they, too, left their boat (and their father) and followed Jesus.

However, it does not seem that these four fishermen started following Jesus fulltime at this point; for they appear to have been called yet again in Luke chapter five.

While Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum on a Sabbath Day (Mark 1:23-24), there was a man present, who had an unclean spirit (demon).

The man cried out in a loud voice, “Ha! What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to

destroy us? I know who you are-the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34 NIV)!

Jesus had already shown that He could, with God’s help, turn water to wine and heal a man’s son at a distance; but what about demons? Would they intimidate Him? Not at all! Jesus commanded the demon, saying,

“Be quiet! Come out of him!”

Luke 4:35

Then the demon threw the man down before all the people and came out of him, without harming the man.

This is the first time that we read that Jesus cast a demon out of anyone. When He did it, amazement came over all of the people in the synagogue; and they said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to the unclean spirits and they come out” (Luke 4:36 NIV)!

As a result this miracle, the news about Jesus began to spread more and more throughout the surrounding area (Mark 1:28 and Luke 4:37).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus choose humble fishermen instead of priests and scholars to be His disciples? What qualities was Jesus looking for in the men He chose?
2. What would you have done if you had been alive in Jesus’ day and He had called you to be a disciple of His?

Would you have been willing to leave all and follow Him?

3. Is Jesus still calling people to follow Him today? How does He call people? See 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

19.

SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW, MANY MIRACLES, and JESUS' FIRST PREACHING TOUR IN GALILEE

Matthew 4:23-25; 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-39; Luke 4:38-44

After He had cast the demon out of a man in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus left the synagogue and went into the home of Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew. James and John also went with Him.

Immediately they told Jesus that Simon's mother-in-law was sick. They found her in bed with a high fever. Jesus came near where she lay; and taking her by the hand, He rebuked the fever and it left her. Then she got up at once and started serving them.

That same afternoon, as the sun was setting and the whole town was gathered at Simon Peter's door, many people were brought to be healed. They had various kinds of sicknesses and some were also demon possessed. Laying His hands on each one, He healed them all (Luke 4:40).

Demons came out of many of them, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But Jesus rebuked the demons and would not let them speak, because they knew He was the Christ (Luke 4:41).

The gospel of Matthew tells that Jesus' miraculous healings fulfilled what the Prophet Isaiah had said about the Messiah, namely,

"He took up our infirmities
and carried our diseases."

Matthew 8:17 NIV; Isaiah 53:4

The next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus left Simon Peter's house and went out to a solitary place to pray.

Simon Peter and others came searching for Him. When they found Him, they told Him that everyone was looking for Him.

The people of Capernaum had gotten wind that Jesus was planning to leave them; so they implored Him not to leave, but He explained that He must go and evangelize other towns also. He said to those that were with Him,

“Let us go somewhere else-
to the nearby villages-
so I can preach there also.
That is why I have come”

Mark 1:38 NIV

Therefore, Jesus went everywhere in Galilee teaching in their synagogues (Matthew 4:23), preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. He was preaching,

“The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:15 NKJV

News about him began to spread to neighboring Syria, and people brought to him all that were ill with various diseases, some suffering severe pain, some demon-

possessed, some having seizures, and some paralyzed; and He healed them.

Large crowds followed Him, not only from Galilee, but also from the Decapolis (ten cities), from Jerusalem and Judea, and from the region across (east of) the Jordan River (Matthew 4:24-25).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think Simon Peter was a married man? Does God require that gospel preachers be single? Does God require that gospel preachers be married?
2. Jesus did not allow demons to announce that He was the Christ? Why did He not want demons to do that?
3. It appears that Jesus thought that preaching and teaching was His main mission (Luke 4:43). That being the case, why do you think He also healed people?
4. Do you think Jesus was pleased that He was being cast in the eyes of people more as a “healer” than as a “teacher?”
5. Why do you think Jesus went to a solitary place to pray?
6. Why did Jesus not stay in Capernaum and preach there? Why did He want to go preach in other places?

20.
THE FINAL CALL OF PETER, ANDREW, JAMES,
AND JOHN
Luke 5:1-11

Following His first (rather short) preaching tour in Galilee, Jesus was at home at Capernaum again. One day He went out along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and people were crowding around Him in order to hear the word of God (Luke 5:1).

He saw two boats sitting on the shore beside the sea. The fishermen had gotten out of the boats and were washing their nets. Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon Peter and asked him to pull out a little from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and taught the crowd from the boat (Luke 5:3).

When Jesus finished teaching the people, He said to Simon Peter, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4 NIV).

Simon Peter answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5 NIV). When they did this, they caught a very large number of fish. They caught so many that their nets began to break. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled the boats so full that they both began to sink.

Amazement overcame Simon Peter and all those that were with him at the huge catch they had taken. Likewise, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, partners with Simon, were overcome with amazement.

When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8)!

Jesus said to Simon,

"Don't be afraid;
from now on
you will be fishing for men."

Luke 5:10

The fishermen pulled their boats on shore, left everything and followed Jesus. It seems that from that time forward they were Jesus' fulltime followers and trainees.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Does the thought disturb you that Jesus may have had to call Simon Peter and his friends twice? If He had to call them twice, what does that suggest to you?
2. Do you think the huge catch of fish was a miracle? Did Simon Peter think it was a miracle? Did the huge catch of fish have anything to do with the decision of Simon Peter and his friends to follow Jesus permanently? What does the huge catch of fish suggest?
3. Was it "prudent" of these four men to leave everything and follow Jesus?
4. Did James and John leave their father, Zebedee, in a bind? Were they justified in leaving him as they did?

21.
SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(CONCERNING TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS)
Matthew 5:1-48

The gospel of Matthew contains Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," which gives a good view of what Jesus emphasized early in His Galilean ministry.

Many people had started coming to Jesus to be taught and to be healed. On one occasion He went up on a hillside and sat down. His closest disciples came to Him, as well as others, and He taught them all.

He began His message by announcing (or pronouncing) a blessing upon a very unlikely group of people. He said that the "poor in spirit" were blessed, as well as those that "mourn;" and He said that "the meek" and those that "hunger and thirst for righteousness" were blessed.

He also announced (or pronounced) a blessing upon the "merciful," the "pure in heart," the "peacemakers," and those that are "persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:3-11).

Such people were not considered to be blessed in those days, nor are they considered to be blessed today. Jesus explained that their blessedness resided in the reward they would get.

Jesus then compared His followers to salt and said that if they should lose their saltiness, they would have no value (Matthew 5:13).

They are also like a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14), and they should let their light shine

so that all may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:15-16).

Jesus did not want people to think that He came to destroy the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17), for He came to fulfill them (Matthew 5:18-19). He said,

“For I tell you that
unless your righteousness surpasses
that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the
law, you will certainly not enter
the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:20 NIV

Jesus described how His teaching contrasted with, and improved upon, the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The Law, in one of the Ten Commandments, said, “You shall not kill” (Exodus 20:13). That was a good commandment, but Jesus had a better one. He said,

“But I tell you that
anyone who is angry with his brother
will be subject to judgment.”

Matthew 5:22a NIV

Even a mild expression of disregard for another person is worthy of punishment, according to Jesus. He said,

“Again, anyone who says to his brother,
‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin.
But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’

will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Matthew 5:22b NIV

Jesus gave next an illustration of how a person's righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law (scribes).

He said that when anyone stood before the altar on the temple grounds in Jerusalem and there remembered that his brother had a legitimate complaint against him, he should leave his gift before the altar. He should then go and be reconciled to his brother, before offering his gift (Matthew 5:23-26).

Jesus quoted another of the Ten Commandments, which said, “You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).” Regarding this, Jesus said,

“But I tell you that
anyone who looks at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her
in his heart.”

Matthew 5:28 NIV

Thus we see that Jesus upgraded the Ten Commandments. He showed that there is a righteousness that goes beyond the Ten Commandments. Jesus was very serious about this. He said that if a person's right eye caused him to sin, he would be better off if his eye were pulled out (Matthew 5:29). He said that if a person's right hand caused him to sin, he would be better off if his hand were cut off (Matthew 5:30).

Jesus also referred to the fact that, according to the Law of Moses, a man who divorces his wife must give her a “certificate of divorce” (Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus had a higher concept of how binding marriage is. In His eyes, marriage was not to be dissolved merely by giving a spouse a “certificate of divorce.” He taught that any man that divorces his wife, unless she has committed fornication, puts her in jeopardy of committing adultery. He said,

“But I tell you that
anyone who divorces his wife,
except for marital unfaithfulness,
causes her to become an adulteress,
and anyone who marries the divorced
woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 5:32 NIV

Again, the Old Testament said that a person should not swear falsely (Leviticus 19:12) and that he should fulfill every oath that he makes to the Lord (Numbers 30:2). Jesus, on the other hand, thought it would be better for a person neither to swear nor to take an oath. He said,

“But I tell you,
Do not swear at all:
either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;
or by the earth, for it is his footstool;
or by Jerusalem,
for it is the city of the Great King.”

Matthew 5:34-35 NIV

Jesus thought it would be nonsensical for a person to swear by his head, since he cannot make one hair of his head white or black (Matthew 5:36). He admonished,

“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’
and your ‘No,’ ‘No’;
anything beyond this
comes from the evil one.”

Matthew 5:37 NIV

As Jesus continued teaching, He referred to another phrase from the Old Testament: “You have heard,” He said, “Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24). He said, however,

“But I tell you,
Do not resist an evil person.
If someone strikes you on the right cheek,
turn to him the other also”

Matthew 5:39 NIV

He took a similar attitude toward a person’s defending his or her possessions. He said,

“And if someone wants to sue you
and take your tunic,
let him have your cloak as well.”

Matthew 5:40 NIV

He extended this attitude also to the service that one person renders to another. He said,

“If someone forces you to go one mile,
go with him two miles.
Give to the one who asks you,
and do not turn away from the one
who wants to borrow from you.”

Matthew 5:41-42 NIV

Jesus referred, at that point, to a common feeling among people that they should love their neighbor (which the Old Testament commends, in Leviticus 19:18) and hate their enemy (which the Old Testament does not commend). This attitude was all-too-common then, as it is now; but was it not satisfactory in Jesus’ eyes. He said,

“But I tell you:
Love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be sons
of your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5: 44-45a NIV

Jesus made reference to the fact that God causes His sun to rise both on evil people and on good people and that He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45b). Then He said,

“If you love those who love you,
what reward will you get?
Are not even the tax collectors doing that?
And if you greet only your brothers,
what are you doing more than others?”

Do not even pagans do that?"

Matthew 5:46-47 NIV

Jesus concluded His discussion of true righteousness by saying,

“Be perfect, therefore,
as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus consider the “poor in spirit” to be blessed? See Matthew 5:3. Why did He consider each of the following to be blessed: “those who mourn,” “the meek,” “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” “the peacemakers,” and “those that are persecuted because of righteousness?” See Matthew 5:4-12.
2. How can a follower of Jesus keep his or her “saltiness?” What is his or her “saltiness?”
3. How can a follower of Jesus let his or her light shine (Matthew 5:13-16)?
4. How can a person avoid committing adultery in his heart? Matthew 5:27-30.
5. Should Jesus’ teaching about divorce (Matthew 5:31-32) and oaths (Matthew 5:33-37) be followed today?

6. Jesus said, “Do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39). What did He mean by that? Does what Jesus said still apply for His followers today?

7. Jesus said, “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matthew 5:41). What does that mean? Does it still apply today?

8. How can a person learn to love his or her enemies?

22.
SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(CONCERNING PERSONAL PIETY)
Matthew 6:1-34

In the “Sermon on the Mount” Jesus set forth His high standards for personal piety.

He warned people not to make a show of their good deeds, otherwise no reward would be forthcoming from their heavenly Father (Matthew 6:1). If a person were to blow a trumpet before himself when he made a charitable gift, as some of the hypocrites were doing, people would know that he made the gift; but that is all the reward he would get (Matthew 6:2). Jesus said,

“But when you give to the needy,
do not let your left hand know
what your right hand is doing,
so that your giving may be in secret.
Then your Father,
who sees what is done in secret,
will reward you.”

Matthew 6:3-4 NIV

Jesus taught that a person should not make a show of praying. He warned His followers not to be like the hypocrites, who loved to pray in the synagogues and while standing on the corners of the streets, thus showing people that they were praying. Jesus said, “Verily, I tell you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:5). He said,

“But when you pray,
go into your room,
close the door
and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
Then your Father,
who sees what is done in secret,
will reward you.”

Matthew 6:6 NIV

Jesus warned that when people pray, they should not “babble” like Gentiles, who think they will be heard because of their many words (Matthew 6:7). He said,

“Do not be like them,
for your Father knows what you need
before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:8 NIV

At this point, Jesus said that people should pray in this manner:

“Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.”

Matthew 6:9 KJV

(Notice that Jesus taught that a prayer should be addressed to the Father.)

The prayer continued:

“Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:10 KJV

(Notice that the coming of God's "kingdom" is the same as His will being done on earth.)

The prayer continued:

"Give us this day our daily bread."

Matthew 6:11 KJV

(Notice how modest the request is: It is a request only for bread for one day.)

The prayer continued:

"And forgive us our debts [wrongs],
as we forgive
our debtors [those who wrong us]."

Matthew 6: 12 KJV

Jesus then ended the prayer by saying,

"And lead us not into temptation [testing],
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Matthew 6:13 KJV

After Jesus had given this prayer, He emphasized how important it is for people to forgive others. He said that if people forgive others, their Father in heaven would forgive them. If, however, people do not forgive others, their Father will not forgive their sins (Matthew 5:14-15).

Jesus said that people should not act sad when they fast, as hypocrites do, nor distort their faces in order to let other people know that they are fasting. People who do that already have their reward (Matthew 6:16). Then He added,

“But when you fast,
put oil on your head and wash your face,
so that it will not be obvious
to men that you are fasting,
but only to your Father, who is unseen;
and your Father,
who sees what is done in secret,
will reward you.”

Matthew 6:17-18 NIV

Jesus warned people not to store up treasures for themselves on earth, where moth and rust can destroy, and where thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19). Rather, He advised,

“But store up for yourselves
treasures in heaven,
where moth and rust do not destroy,
and where thieves do not break in and steal.
For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:20-21 NIV

Jesus did not want His followers to be blinded by greed. He taught that a person's eye is the source of light

for his whole body, and if a person's eye is "single" (healthy), his whole body will be full of light (Matthew 6:22). However, if a person's eye is bad, his whole body will be full of darkness. Jesus exclaimed,

"If then the light within you is darkness,
how great is that darkness!"

Matthew 6:23 NIV

Jesus reminded His listeners that no one can serve two masters, for he will either hate one master and love the other, or he will be loyal to one master and despise the other. Then Jesus cautioned,

"You cannot serve God
and mammon [money]."

Matthew 6:24b NKJV

Matthew chapter six comes to a close with Jesus' beautiful dialogue concerning anxiety. Here are Jesus' words: (No comment on them is necessary.)

"Therefore I tell you,
do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or drink;
or about your body,
what you will wear.
Is not life more important than food,
and the body more important than clothes?
Look at the birds of the air;
they do not sow or reap

or store away in barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not much more valuable than they?
Who of you by worrying
can add a single hour to his life?
And why do you worry about clothes?
See how the lilies of the field grow.
They do not labor or spin.
Yet I tell you that not even Solomon
in all his splendor was dressed
like one of these.
If that is how God clothes
the grass of the field,
which is here today
and tomorrow is thrown into the fire,
will he not much more clothe you,
O you of little faith?
So do not worry, saying,
‘What shall we eat?’
or ‘What shall we drink?’
or ‘What shall we wear?’
For the pagans run after all these things,
and your heavenly Father knows
that you need them.”

Matthew 6:25-32 NIV

Jesus summed up His teaching against worry by
saying,

“But seek first his kingdom
and his righteousness,
and all these things

will be given to you as well.
Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will worry about itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
Matthew 6:33-34 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did Jesus mean when He said (Matthew 6:3), “Let not your left hand know what your right hand it doing?”
2. Jesus warned (Matthew 6:7) that when we pray we should not “babble” like the Gentiles. What did He mean by this?
3. Is the “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13) to be prayed on all occasions? Or is it a sample prayer, which Jesus used to show us how to pray? What can be learned from this prayer?
4. Why should people keep their fasting a secret (Matthew 6:16)?
5. What is wrong with our storing up treasures for ourselves on earth (Matthew 6:19)?
6. Is it true that greed blinds people? If it is true, how does greed blind people?
7. How can we learn to stop worrying about food and clothing?

8. What does it mean to seek “God’s kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33)? Why should we seek these “first?” What reward is promised for seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness first?

23.
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(CONCERNING VARIOUS TOPICS)
Matthew 7:1-23

Jesus did not want His followers to be judgmental in their dealings with people. He explained that they would be judged the same way they judged others. He also explained that the standard they used to measure out to others would be used to measure out to them (Matthew 7:1-2). Then He admonished,

“Do not judge,
or you too will be judged.”

Matthew 7:1 NIV

He wondered how a person could look at the speck in his brother’s eye and not notice that he had a plank in his own eye. Jesus asked,

“How can you say to your brother,
‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’
when all the time there is a plank
in your own eye?”

Matthew 7:4 NIV

Jesus spoke harshly concerning the person who might overlook the plank in his own eye. He said,

“You hypocrite,
first take the plank out of your own eye,

and then you will see clearly
to remove the speck
from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:5 NIV

Jesus' followers must use wisdom in deciding to whom they should impart Jesus' teaching, for He warned,

"Do not give dogs what is sacred;
do not throw your pearls to pigs.
If you do,
they may trample them under their feet,
and then turn and tear you to pieces."

Matthew 7:6 NIV

After having said these things, Jesus began to encourage His people to pray, saying,

"Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives;
he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks,
the door will be opened."

Matthew 7:7-8 NIV

A disciple's confidence in the effectiveness of prayer appears to be based on that person's confidence in the goodness of God, for Jesus asked,

“Which of you,
if his son asks for bread,
will give him a stone?
Or if he asks for a fish,
will give him a snake?
If you, then, though you are evil,
know how to give good gifts
to your children,
how much more will your Father in heaven
give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Matthew 7:9-11 NIV

At this point, Jesus came to what is called “the Golden Rule.” He admonished,

“So in everything, do to others
what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 7:12 NIV

Jesus was aware that it is not always easy to live as He suggested, for He said,

“Enter through the narrow gate.
For wide is the gate and broad is the road
that leads to destruction,
and many enter through it.
But small is the gate and narrow the road
that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

He warned against false prophets, who would try to lead His followers away from the truth and righteousness:

“Watch out for false prophets.
They come to you in sheep’s clothing,
but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

Matthew 7:15 NIV

Then Jesus explained how a person could recognize a “false prophet:”

“By their fruit you will recognize them.
Do people pick grapes from thornbushes,
or figs from thistles?
Likewise every good tree bears good fruit,
but a bad tree bears bad fruit.
A good tree cannot bear bad fruit,
and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.
Every tree that does not bear good fruit
is cut down and thrown into the fire.
Thus, by their fruit
you will recognize them.”

Matthew 7:16-20 NIV

Nearing the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus informed His followers that entrance into the kingdom in heaven would be selective:

“Not everyone who says to me,
‘Lord, Lord,’
will enter the kingdom of heaven,

but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 7:21 NIV

There will be unpleasant surprises on the Judgment Day, for Jesus said,

“Many will say to me on that day,
 ‘Lord, Lord,
 did we not prophesy in your name,
 and in your name drive out demons
 and perform many miracles?’
 Then I will tell them plainly,
 ‘I never knew you.
 Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Matthew 7:22-23 NIV

Jesus concluded His “Sermon on the Mount” with a parable concerning a wise man and a foolish man. He said that everyone that hears His words and puts them into practice is like a wise man that built his house on the rock. The rain came and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall because it was built on the rock.

He said that everyone that hears His words and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man that built his house on the sand. The rain came and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

The people who heard the Sermon on the Mount were entranced by it. It was beautiful, simple, forceful, and

compelling. People were also impressed that Jesus taught with authority. Some of what He said was similar to what the people had heard before, but much of it was new.

Jesus' teaching left no room for duplicity or sophistry. He emphasized the importance of pleasing God in the best and highest way possible. This was new and exciting!

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why does God not want His people to judge others (Matthew 7:1)? What do you think? Is there a difference between judging people and making decisions about right and wrong? What is the difference? Please explain.
2. Jesus wants His followers to ask God for the things they need (Matthew 7:9-11)? Why do you suppose He wants them to do that? Are we permitted to ask God for things we want but may not need? What do you think?
3. How does "the Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12) sum up the Law and the Prophets?
4. Does it take effort to lead a Christian life? Is it difficult or easy? See Matthew 7:13-14. What do you think?
5. How can you recognize a false prophet? See Matthew 7:16-20. Have you ever seen a false prophet?
6. Is it possible that people who prophesy in Jesus' name and who (supposedly) cast out demons and heal people

could be denied entrance into heaven? If it is possible, on what basis would entrance be denied them? See Matthew 7:21-23.

24.

THE HEALING OF A LEPER

Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16

Jesus came down from the mountainside, after He had spoken His “Sermon on the Mount,” and large crowds of people followed Him as He went from town to town in Galilee.

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man who was covered with leprosy came and fell down before Him and begged Him, saying, “Lord, if you were willing, you could cleanse me” (Matthew 8:2).

This is first time that we read that a leper came to Jesus for healing. What would Jesus do? Would He touch the leper? Yes, He reached out His hand and touched him, saying,

“I am willing. Be cleansed!”

Matthew 8:3

Immediately, the man’s leprosy left him; and this, no doubt, had a tremendous impact on the people, as they watched leprosy disappear from the man’s skin.

Jesus attempted to ward off an increase in the spread of His fame, by saying to the man whom He had healed,

“See that you don’t tell this to anyone.
But go, show yourself to the priest
and offer the sacrifices
that Moses commanded for your cleansing,
as a testimony to them.”

Mark 1:44 NIV

The question is, would the priest believe a man, who came claiming that Jesus had healed him of leprosy, or would the priest be so attached to rituals and traditions that he would not be able to believe?

Whether or not the man actually went to the priest as Jesus told him to do, we do not know; but we do know that He did not keep quiet about what Jesus had done for him. He began telling many things about Jesus and spreading the news of Him abroad (Mark 1:45).

The man's activity resulted in so many people coming out of the villages and towns to hear Jesus and to be healed that Jesus could no longer go into a town and teach (Mark 1:45). Instead, He was forced to stay out in countryside, where great crowds came to Him from all over.

He withdrew often, however, to wilderness areas to pray (Luke 5:16).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus tell the man that He had healed to go and show himself to a priest? See Leviticus 14:2-7.
2. How was the cleansing of a leper a testimony to the priests? Do you think the priests were inclined, or disinclined, to believe in Jesus?
3. Did the man's disobedience to Jesus' command to keep quiet about his healing cause inconvenience to Jesus? Did His disobedience impede the progress of Jesus' work? What can we conclude from this?

4. Why did Jesus withdraw to wilderness areas in order to pray? What can we learn from this?

25.

THE HEALING OF A PARALYZED MAN

Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26

Jesus temporarily left off teaching in the area around the Sea of Galilee and started back to Capernaum. In order to get to there, He crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat (Matthew 9:1), thereby losing the crowd that had been following Him.

While He was at Capernaum, a delegation of Pharisees and scribes (teachers of the Law) came to Him from every village of Galilee, and even from Judea and Jerusalem; and He taught them. So many people came that there was no room left either in the house where He was teaching or outside the door.

While Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and the scribes, four men came carrying a paralyzed man on a small bed; but they could not get the man into the house, because there were so many people in it.

The four men were very ingenious and very determined. They took the paralyzed man up on the roof of the house and tore a hole in the roof (Mark 2:4). They lowered the bed, on which the man lay, down through the roof right in front of Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew says that Jesus “saw their faith” (Matthew 9:2) and said to the paralyzed man,

“Take heart, my child.
Your sins are forgiven.”

Matthew 9:2

Some of the Pharisees and scribes, who were sitting in the house, thought to themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone” (Luke 5:21 NIV)?

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asked them,

“Why do you entertain
evil thoughts in your hearts?
Which is easier: to say,
‘Your sins are forgiven,’
or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’”

Matthew 9:4-5 NIV

Jesus continued,

“But so that you may know
that the Son of Man has authority
on earth to forgive sins. . . .”

Matthew 9:6a NIV

He said to the paralytic,

“Get up, take your bed and go home.”

Matthew 9:6

Immediately, the man got up and picked up the little bed on which he had been carried and went out of the house before them all, praising God.

At that, amazement came over all of those that witnessed what Jesus had done. They praised God that God had given such power (authority) to men (Matthew 9:8). Some of them were filled with fear, and said, “We

have never seen such things,” and, “We have seen remarkable things today!”

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did Matthew mean when he wrote (Matthew 9:2) that Jesus “saw their faith?” How can faith be seen?
2. Do you think that the healing of the paralyzed man should have convinced the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus was the Messiah? Why did it not convince them?
3. Are you surprised that Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins? Please explain.
4. Do you think Jesus handled the healing of the paralyzed man well? Please, explain.

26.**THE CALLING OF MATTHEW
and A DISCUSSION OF FASTING**

Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:27-39

Jesus went out for a walk by the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd of people started following Him; and He began teaching them, as was His custom.

As He walked along the shore, He saw a tax collector named “Matthew” (Matthew 9:9) sitting at the tax collector’s booth. Jesus said to the tax collector, “Follow me.”

Matthew, whom we also know as “Levi the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), got up, left everything, and followed Jesus.

To celebrate his being called by Jesus, Matthew threw a feast at his house, to which he invited Jesus and many of Jesus’ followers. He also invited many of his fellow tax collectors and others.

Some of the Pharisees saw Jesus and His followers eating with the tax collectors and others, all of whom they regarded as “sinners.”

Then the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes) asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” (Luke 5:30 NIV)?

Upon hearing this question, Jesus gave the Pharisees an apt answer. He said,

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor,
but the sick.”

Luke 5:31 NIV

Jesus also cited a passage from Hosea, which would have changed their attitude, had they understood it. Jesus said,

“But go and learn what this means:
‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”

Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13a NIV

Then Jesus added,

“For I have not come to call the righteous,
but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:32 NIV

Following that, the Pharisees and their associates brought another complaint against Jesus. They said, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking” (Luke 5:33 NIV).

Jesus replied,

“Can you make
the guests of the bridegroom fast
while he is with them?”

Luke 5:34 NIV

Jesus was “the Bridegroom,” according to John the Baptist (John 3:27-30); and Jesus accepted that designation. In fact, He used the designation to speak prophetically about His death. He said,

“But the time will come
when the bridegroom
will be taken from them;
in those days they will fast.”

Luke 5:35 NIV

Then Jesus used a metaphor to explain why His disciples did not fast on the customary fast days. He said,

“No one tears a patch
from a new garment
and sews it on an old one.
If he does,
he will have torn the new garment,
and the patch from the new
will not match the old.”

Luke 5:36 NIV

Jesus did not come into the world merely to “patch” up a system of religion that was becoming outdated. Instead, He brought something very new into the world.

Jesus then used another metaphor to illustrate the folly of trying to mix His teaching with old customs. He said,

“And no one pours new wine
into old wineskins.
If he does,
the new wine will burst the skins,
the wine will run out
and the wineskins will be ruined.”

Luke 5:37 NIV

He added,

“No, new wine must be poured
into new wineskins.”

Luke 5:38 NIV

Jesus then characterized (in a half-humorous way) the attitude that the Pharisees and teachers of the Law had toward His teaching. He said,

“And no one after drinking old wine
wants the new, for he says,
‘The old is better.’”

Luke 5:39 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did God mean when He said (through Hosea), “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6)?
2. Why did Jesus associate with all kinds of people? What did Jesus mean when He said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners?”
3. To what was Jesus referring when He spoke of a “patch from a new garment” and of the “new wine?” Was He referring to His teaching as being new?
4. If the expressions “patch from a new garment” and “new wine” refer to Jesus’ teaching, to what then do the

expressions the “old garment” and the “old wineskins” refer?

5. Did Jesus set any fast days for His followers? Does Jesus’ teaching have anything to do with the observance of certain days? See Galatians 4:10-11. Do you think that people who believe in Jesus should observe the special days that God gave the children of Israel to keep? See Colossians 2:16-17.

27.**PLUCKING GRAIN ON THE SABBATH**

Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5

As Jesus and His disciples were walking through grain fields on a Sabbath, His disciples grew hungry. They began to pluck heads of grain and eat them, rubbing the husks from the grain with their hands.

Certain of the Pharisees, who were following along after Jesus, said to Him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not permitted to do on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:2) Why are they doing what is not permitted” (Luke 6:2)?

Jesus answered,

“Haven’t you read what David did
when he and his companions were hungry?”

Matthew 12:3 NIV

Jesus was referring to the time when David fled from King Saul and went into the house of God and asked Abiathar, the high priest, for food. Abiathar then gave David some of the consecrated bread, which only the priests were supposed to eat; and David and his men ate it (Mark 2:26).

The Pharisees were willing to overlook what David did, because they knew that He was God’s anointed one. By the same token, they should have been willing to overlook what Jesus’ disciples were doing, in view of the fact that also Jesus was God’s anointed one; but they were not willing.

Jesus pointed out for the Pharisees that the priests at the temple break the Sabbath when they sacrifice animals on the Sabbath. He said,

“Or haven’t you read in the Law
that on the Sabbath
the priests in the temple desecrate the day
and yet are innocent?”

Matthew 12:5 NIV

Jesus’ critics were willing to overlook what the priests were doing at the temple because of the significance of the temple. Jesus said,

“I tell you that one
greater than the temple is here.”

Matthew 12:6 NIV

Only by the most stringent interpretation to the Sabbath law could anyone think that Jesus’ disciples were doing anything wrong by plucking a few grains out of the field and eating the grains.

Jesus said (Matthew 12:7) that the Pharisees would not have condemned His disciples, if they had understood the meaning of the passage in Hosea, which says, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6).

Some of the Pharisees apparently felt that the Sabbath should be strictly kept, no matter what difficulty it placed upon people. Jesus said to them,

“The Sabbath was made for man,
not man for the Sabbath.”

Mark 2:27 NIV

He also said,

“So the Son of Man is Lord
even of the Sabbath.”

Mark 2:28 NIV

The charge that the Pharisees leveled against Jesus' disciples was unjustified for two reasons: First, Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath and could do as He pleased; and, second, the Pharisees were not showing mercy (compassion) in their judgments.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think Jesus' disciples were really breaking Exodus 20:8-11? Could what the disciples were doing be rightfully called “work?”
2. How would an understanding of the passage, “I desire mercy not sacrifice,” have kept the Pharisees from condemning Jesus' disciples for plucking a little grain to eat as they passed by on the Sabbath?
3. Could Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, have totally disregarded the Sabbath Law, if He had chosen to do so? Did He totally disregard it? Why do you suppose He did not choose to disregard it totally?

28.**MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND**

Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

On a subsequent Sabbath, as Jesus was going from town to town in Galilee, He went into a synagogue at a certain place and found there a man with a withered hand.

Some of the scribes and Pharisees in the synagogue were watching Jesus to see whether or not He would heal the man's withered hand on the Sabbath. They wanted to find something against Jesus in order to accuse Him. So they asked Him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:10)?

Jesus was not deceived by their innocent sounding question. He knew that they were trying to trick Him into saying something against the Sabbath or into healing the man on the Sabbath and thereby breaking (as they supposed) the Sabbath law.

Jesus accepted their challenge, even though He was aware that it was dangerous to do so; for breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death (Exodus 31:15). He said to the man with the withered hand, "Stand up in front of everyone" (Mark 3:3); and the man stood up.

To the scribes and Pharisees Jesus put the following question:

"I ask you, is it lawful to do good
or to do harm on the Sabbath,
to save a life or to destroy it?"

Luke 6:9 NASU

The scribes and Pharisees did not answer with a single word. They would not even concede that it might be better to do good on the Sabbath than to do harm.

Looking around at them, Jesus became very angry with them (Mark 3:5). His anger, however, was tinged with sadness at their hardness of heart (Mark 3:5); and He tried to reason with them, saying,

“If any of you has a sheep
and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath,
will you not take hold of it and lift it out?
How much more valuable is a man
than a sheep!
Therefore it is lawful
to do good on the Sabbath.”

Matthew 12:11-12 NIV

Even though the scribes and Pharisees could not dispute the truthfulness of what Jesus had said, they were not moved by it.

So then, Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and it was restored as healthy as the other (Matthew 12:13).

At this, the Pharisees were filled with rage. Jesus had defeated them both by His argument and by His power to heal. Stymied, they went out and sought advice from the Herodians (politicians), how they might do away with Him (Mark 3:5).

Thus, we see opposition to Jesus beginning to harden. No longer were His enemies only thinking bad thoughts

about him, or asking tricky questions of Him. Some of them were now plotting to bring about His death.

Jesus knew what the scribes and Pharisees were up to and He left that place; but many people that wanted to be healed followed Him. He healed them all, but He cautioned them not to make Him known (Matthew 12:16).

Matthew, who wrote the Gospel of Matthew, explained that Jesus' desire for secrecy about His cures fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which said,

“Here is my servant
whom I have chosen,
the one I love,
in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.”

Matthew 12:18-19; Isaiah 42:1-2 NIV

Isaiah also said,

“A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he leads justice to victory.
In his name the nations will put their hope.”

Matthew 12:20-21; Isaiah 42:3-4 NIV

Jesus fulfilled these prophecies by teaching people quietly and healing them as secretly as possible. He was not

a rabble-rouser, who made loud speeches; nor did He hurt anyone.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. If the replies that Jesus gave to the scribes and Pharisees were reasonable and mild, why did they get so mad at Him?
2. Why did some of the scribes and Pharisees want to put Jesus to death? What do you think?
3. Do you think that the Sabbath law actually forbid a doctor to tend to a patient on the Sabbath, or was that merely one of their traditions?
4. What do you think the prophecy meant, which said, “No one will hear his voice in the streets” (Isaiah 42:2)?
5. What do you think the prophecy meant, which said, “A bruised reed he will not break” (Isaiah 42:3)?

29.

CHOOSING THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16

As opposition to Jesus grew from the scribes and Pharisees, so grew also His fame and popularity among a wide variety of people.

Jesus walked one day with His disciples near the Sea of Galilee and a large number of people from Galilee were following Him. People were also present from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the region on the other side of the Jordan, as well as from around Tyre and Sidon; for many people had heard about all the things that He was doing.

The people had all kinds of afflictions and they were flocking to Him so they could touch Him. For that reason, He asked His disciples to find Him a boat to get into, so that the people would not crowd Him so (Mark 3:9); and He healed many.

Occasionally, when people with unclean spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, “You are the Son of God” (Mark 3:11); but He ordered them repeatedly not to make Him known (Mark 3:12).

It came to pass one day that Jesus went up on a hillside to pray and spent all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). When it was day, He called for certain of His disciples to come to Him, and He chose from among them twelve to be with Him on a continuing basis (Mark 3:14).

These twelve He called “apostles” (Luke 6:13), because He intended to send them out to preach and to cast out demons (Mark 3:15). The word “apostle” means someone that is sent on a mission of some kind.

Among those whom Jesus chose to be apostles were Simon (to whom He gave the name “Peter”), and Peter’s brother Andrew, and James the son of Zebedee, and James’ brother John (whom He called “sons of thunder”) (Mark 3:17). He also chose Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector. In addition, He chose James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus (whom Luke calls “Judas the son of James”), Simon the Canaanite (who was known as a “Zealot”), and Judas Iscariot (who betrayed Him).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you suppose Jesus instructed the people with unclean spirits not to make Him known? Did He want to keep His work a secret? Or did He not want the good news about Him to be proclaimed by people with unclean spirits? What do you think?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus chose twelve apostles? Is the number twelve significant in any way? Why did Jesus want the Twelve to be with Him on a continuing basis?
3. Do you get the impression that Jesus had plans for the dispersion of His teaching and for the expansion of His kingdom?
4. Do you think Jesus was planning for His kingdom to take on concrete form on earth? Do you think He envisioned the church?

30.
SERMON IN THE FIELD
Luke 6:17-49

After Jesus had chosen the Twelve Apostles, He and the Twelve came down from the hillside. They found a great crowd of disciples waiting. Some of them were from Judea and Jerusalem, and others were from the coastal area of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear Jesus and to be healed.

Those that were burdened with unclean spirits were cleansed. The whole crowd was trying to touch Him, because power was going out from Him to heal (Luke 6:19).

While the crowd was gathered around Jesus in a level place (a field), He spoke one of His great sermons. It is similar to the Sermon on the Mount, yet slightly different.

He spoke this sermon to His disciples (Luke 6:20), but many other people heard the message as well.

The Sermon in the Field (or level place) began with Beatitudes (blessings), as had the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.”

Luke 6:20-21 NIV

The blessings in this sermon seem to be more oriented toward the afterlife than are the blessings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12). For example, the blessing on those that are hated and persecuted because of Him is that they will be greatly rewarded in heaven (Luke 6:22). He said,

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,
because great is your reward in heaven.
For that is how their fathers
treated the prophets.”

Luke 6:23 NIV

In contrast to the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon in the Field also contains “woes.” Jesus said,

“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.
Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when all men speak well of you,
for that is how their fathers
treated the false prophets.”

Luke 6:24-26 NIV

It did not take Jesus long to get down to the core of His message. He said,

“But I tell you who hear me:
Love your enemies,

do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who mistreat you.”

Luke 6:27-28 NIV

As we see, Jesus gave specific instructions concerning how His followers should treat the people that hate them, curse them, or mistreat them. They should do good things for those people, bless them, and pray for them. He also gave specific instructions as to what His followers should do in case someone hits them in the face or takes away their coat. He said,

“If someone strikes you on one cheek,
turn to him the other also.
If someone takes your cloak [coat],
do not stop him
from taking your tunic [shirt].”

Luke 6:29 NIV

We do not often hear anyone mentioning what Jesus said next. He said,

“Give to everyone who asks you,
and if anyone takes what belongs to you,
do not demand it back.”

Luke 6:30 NIV

Jesus included the “golden Rule” in this sermon, as He had done in the Sermon on the Mount. He said,

“Do to others
as you would have them do to you.”
Luke 6:31 NIV

It is nothing special if Jesus’ followers love those that love them, because even sinners love those that love them (Luke 6:32). Also, it is nothing special if His followers do good things for those that do good things for them, for sinners do that, too (Luke 6:33).

Then He asked His followers what special credit it was to them if they lent to people, whom they knew would pay them back. He explained, “Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full” (Luke 6:34). Jesus maintained that His followers should lend even to their enemies, saying,

“But love your enemies,
do good to them,
and lend to them
without expecting to get anything back.”
Luke 6:35a NIV

Jesus indicated that if His followers lend to enemies, they would be imitating God, who is “kind even to the ungrateful and the wicked” (Luke 6:35b). Then Jesus urged,

“Be merciful,
just as your Father is merciful.”
Luke 6:36 NIV

Jesus also warned against judging, saying

“Do not judge,
and you will not be judged.
Do not condemn,
and you will not be condemned.
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Luke 6:37 NIV

He emphasized that people would be treated the way they treat others. If they give to others, others will give to them in “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over” (Luke 6:38).

Then, turning to another subject, He asked,

“Can a blind man lead a blind man?
Will they not both fall into a pit?”

Luke 6:39 NIV

He said that a student is not above his teacher and that every student that has been fully trained is like his teacher (Luke 6:40).

As He had done in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:3-5), Jesus pointed out how ridiculous it would be if one of His followers were to try to take a speck out of his brother’s eye while he had a plank in his own eye (Luke 6:41-42a). Jesus admonished,

“You hypocrite,
first take the plank out of your eye,
and then you will see clearly
to remove the speck

from your brother's eye.”

Luke 6:42b NIV

Next, Jesus spoke about a tree and its fruit. He said that the quality of a tree can be determined by the kind of fruit it produces (Luke 6:43-44). He added,

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Luke 6:45 NIV

Jesus brought His Sermon in the Field to a close (Luke 6:46-49) by reciting basically the same parable that He had used to close His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27).

The parable is about two men, one of whom built his house on a good foundation. That man is like the person that hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice.

The other man built his house on land that had no foundation. That man is like a person that hears Jesus' words and does not put them into practice.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think Jesus meant for us to do good things for those that hate us? Did He mean for us literally to speak a blessing to those that curse us? Does He want us actually to pray for those that mistreat us?

2. Do you think that Jesus really wants us to turn the other cheek to someone that hits us? Do you think Jesus really wants us to offer our shirt to a person that takes our coat? Did Jesus get this teaching from the Old Testament, or was it new?
3. Do you think Jesus wants us to lend to people who may not pay us back? Suppose a brother or sister comes and wants to borrow from us again and again, what should we do? Should we tell the church about it and ask for the church's help in the matter?
4. How can we avoid judging people in view of the fact that we must decide between what is right and what is wrong?
5. Is it a good policy in life to be generous with what we have? If so, why is it a good policy?

31. **THE CENTURION'S SERVANT** Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

After Jesus had finished His Sermon in the Field, He went back to Capernaum (Luke 7:1). As He was going into Capernaum, some of the local elders met Him.

A centurion in the Roman army had heard about Jesus and he sent the elders to ask Jesus to come and cure his servant, who was on the point of death.

It must have been through the elders that the centurion said to Jesus, "Lord, my servant is at home smitten with paralysis, suffering greatly" (Matthew 8:6).

By combining the accounts of Matthew and Luke, one comes to the conclusion that the centurion went along with the elders (Matthew 8:5), even though He may have stayed at a distance.

The elders of Capernaum did not seem to doubt that Jesus could heal the centurion's servant. They encouraged Jesus to come quickly, saying that the centurion was worthy of Jesus' doing this for him, since he loved their nation and had built them a synagogue (Luke 7:5).

Jesus also had no doubt that He could heal the servant; for He said, "I will come and heal him" (Matthew 8:7), and He went with them (Luke 7:6).

The centurion must have returned to his house before Jesus arrived and there remembered that the children of Israel did not customarily go into the house of a Gentile. They thought such a house was unclean.

So, when Jesus was not far from the centurion's house, he sent friends to Jesus, who said,

“Lord, do not trouble yourself,
for I am not worthy to have you
come under my roof;
therefore I did not presume to come to you.
But say the word,
and let my servant be healed.”

Luke 7:6-7 RSV

The centurion’s message continued,

“For I myself am a man under authority,
with soldiers under me.
I tell this one, ‘Go,’
and he goes;
and that one, ‘Come,’
and he comes.
I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’
and he does it.”

Luke 7:8 NIV

When Jesus heard what the man said, He marveled.
Turning to the crowd that followed Him, He remarked,

“I tell you the truth,
I have not found anyone in Israel
with such great faith.”

Matthew 8:10 NIV

Then Jesus made a statement that was pregnant with
meaning for the future. He indicated that there would be
people from all nations in heaven. He said,

“I say to you that many
will come from the east and the west,
and will take their places at the feast
with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 8:11 NIV

Jesus then indicated that the children of Israel (whom one would expect to see in heaven) will not all be there. He said,

“But the subjects of the kingdom
will be thrown outside, into the darkness,
where there will be weeping
and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 8:12 NIV

Following that, Jesus assured the centurion (by means of centurion’s friends) that it would be done for him, just as he had believed that it would.

Even though Jesus did not go to the centurion’s house, the man’s servant was healed at that very hour.

When those that had been sent by the centurion returned to the house, they found the servant well.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why was Jesus impressed with the centurion’s words?
What do you think?

2. Do you get the impression that the miracles, which Jesus was doing, seemed to be growing more and more astonishing? Please explain what you think.
3. What do you think the reason is why some of the kinsmen of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may not be at the heavenly feast?
4. Do you expect to see people from other races and nations, in addition to some of the children of Israel, in heaven? What reason do you have to expect that people from other nations and races will be there?

32.

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON AT NAIN

Luke 7:11-17

After Jesus had healed the Centurions' servant at Capernaum, He next went to a town in Galilee called, "Nain." Nain is thought to have been about ten miles southeast of Nazareth. Jesus' disciples and a large crowd of people went along with Him.

As Jesus drew near the gate of Nain, it happened that a young man that had died was being carried out to be buried or placed in a tomb. The dead man was the only son of his mother, a widow. A large crowd of people was coming out of the town with her.

When the Lord saw her, He knew immediately what the situation was. He was moved with compassion for her and said to her, "Don't cry."

Jesus then went up to the litter on which the young man was being carried and touched it; and the men that were carrying it stood still. Jesus spoke, "Young man, I say to you, 'Get up!'"

At that, the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus presented him back to his mother.

The effect was so great on the people that witnessed this miracle that awe seized them. They all praised God, saying, "A great prophet has been raised up among us" and "God has come to help His people" (Luke 7:16).

News about these activities in Galilee spread south into Judea and into all the surrounding countryside.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What motivated Jesus to raise the young man back to life?
2. Is the raising of the widow's son at Nain the only instance of Jesus' having raised someone from the dead?
3. What does this miracle say about Jesus?

33.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S QUESTION

Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35

While John the Baptist was in prison, his disciples came to him and reported what Jesus was doing.

John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one (Messiah) who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

The two disciples whom John sent came to Jesus and said, “John the Baptist sent us to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’”

When John’s disciples arrived, Jesus had just cured many people of their afflictions. He had cast out evil spirits and given sight to many people that were blind. So Jesus replied to John’s messengers,

“Go back and report to John
what you have seen and heard:
The blind receive sight, the lame walk,
those who have leprosy are cured,
the deaf hear, the dead are raised,
and the good news is preached to the poor.
Blessed is the man
who does not fall away on account of me.”

Luke 7:22-23 NIV

Jesus knew that John was well acquainted with the prophecies of Old Testament and that he would know that the Messiah was supposed to do the very things that Jesus was doing.

After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd concerning John. He asked,

“What did you go out into the desert
to see?

A reed swayed by the wind?

If not, what did you go out to see?

A man dressed in fine clothes?”

Luke 7:24-25a NIV

Jesus answered His own question, by saying,

“No, those who wear expensive clothes
and indulge in luxury
are in palaces.”

Luke 7:25b NIV

Continuing to speak of John the Baptist, Jesus asked,

“But what did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you,
and more than a prophet.

This is the one

about whom it is written [Malachi 3:1]:

‘I will send my messenger
ahead of you,

who will prepare your way before you.’”

Luke 7:26-27 NIV

Then Jesus said,

“Truly, I say to you,

among those born of women
 there has risen no one greater
 than John the Baptist;
 yet he who is least
 in the kingdom of heaven
 is greater than he.”

Matthew 11:11 RSV

Having said these things, Jesus began to speak about the “kingdom of heaven.” In the Gospel of Luke the “kingdom of heaven” is called the “kingdom of God” (Luke 7:28), showing that two expressions are the same.

Some violent men and ruling authorities among the children of Israel misunderstood the kingdom of God. They thought they could bring it about by force. Jesus said,

“From the days of John the Baptist
 until now
 the kingdom of heaven
 has suffered violence,
 and men of violence take it by force.”

Matthew 11:12 RSV

Yet, in spite the misunderstanding and misdeeds of violent men, God was in the process of ushering in the kingdom in His own way, and according to His own plan. John the Baptist was a part of that plan. Jesus said of John,

“For all the prophets and the law
 prophesied until John
 and if you are willing to accept it,

he is Eli'jah who is to come.”

Matthew 11:13-14 RSV

Then Jesus added,

“He who has ears to hear,
let him hear.”

Matthew 11:15 RSV

Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, interposed a comment about the way in which people had received John's message. Luke said that all of the people, even tax collectors that heard John's words, acknowledged that God's way was right and just. They acknowledged it by allowing themselves to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29).

The Pharisees and the experts in the Law, however, rejected God's purpose for themselves, in that they did not submit to baptism by John (Luke 7:30).

Jesus found an apt analogy to the people that resisted both His and John's message. He said they were like children sitting in the marketplace, whom nothing pleased.

Some of the children called out to others, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry” (Luke 7:32 NIV).

Jesus explained His analogy by saying,

“For John the Baptist came
neither eating bread nor drinking wine,
and you say, ‘He has a demon.’
The Son of Man came eating and drinking,
and you say,

‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard,
a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’”

Luke 7:33-34 NIV

The Pharisees and experts in the Law tried to discredit both Jesus and John the Baptist, but their accusations proved to be inconsistent and were, therefore, self-defeating. Jesus said,

“Wisdom is proved right
by all her children.”

Luke 7:35 NIV

That is to say, every proposition is proven right or wrong by all of its consequences and implications.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why was it that John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask whether or not Jesus was the one who was to come? Do you think John was disappointed in some way with what Jesus was doing?
2. In what way (or ways) are the persons who are least in the kingdom of God greater than (Luke 7:28) John the Baptist?
3. What did the answer mean, which Jesus sent back to John the Baptist (Luke 7:22-23)? Does the fact that Jesus performed all those miracles show that He was the Messiah? See Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; and 61:1.

4. Are the people today, who refuse baptism, rejecting God's purpose for themselves, as the Pharisees and experts in the Law did (Luke 7:30)? See Mark 16:15-16.

34.

IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE PHARISEE

Luke 7:36-50

Tension was building between Jesus and the Pharisees, not only in Jerusalem, but also in Galilee.

In spite of this tension, a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to eat with him; and Jesus went into the Pharisees' house and sat down. More accurately, He "reclined" for the meal, as was the custom.

A certain woman, who had the reputation in the town of being a sinner, learned that Jesus was at Simon's house. She came into the house and brought with her myrrh (expensive, oily perfume) in an alabaster jar.

Standing behind Jesus' feet, the woman wept; and her tears dropped on His feet. Seeing this, she began to dry His feet with her long hair. She also kissed His feet and anointed them with myrrh (Luke 7:38).

When the Pharisee, who had invited Jesus, saw what the woman was doing, he thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who was touching Him and that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:38).

As it turned out, Jesus knew far more than the Pharisee could guess: He knew what had happened in the woman's life, and He knew what the Pharisee was thinking.

Calling the Pharisee by name, Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

Simon said, "Tell me, Teacher."

At this, Jesus asked him a riddle. He said: "Two men were in debt to a certain moneylender. One man owed him

five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay, so the moneylender canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him the more” (Luke 7:42)?

Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom the bigger debt was canceled.”

“You have judged rightly,” Jesus said.

Then Jesus turned to the woman but said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with myrrh” (Luke 7:44-46).

Continuing to speak to Simon, Jesus said,

“Therefore I tell you,
her sins, which are many,
are forgiven,
for she loved much.”

Luke 7:47a RSV

Then Jesus gave Simon something to think about, relative to his own life. He said,

“But he who is forgiven little,
loves little.”

Luke 7:47b RSV

Simon had not loved Jesus even enough to show Him common courtesy. His lack of love showed that Simon either had not recognized his own sins or, having recognized them had not repented of them, and for that reason had not been forgiven of them.

To the woman, Jesus spoke reassuringly by saying,

“Your sins are forgiven.”

Luke 7:48 NIV

Others who were eating with Jesus began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins” (Luke 7:49)?

To the woman Jesus said,

“Your faith has saved you;
go in peace.”

Luke 7:50 NIV

After this, Jesus traveled about in Galilee from one town or village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God; and the Twelve were with him (Luke 8:1).

Certain women whom Jesus had cured of evil spirits and diseases were also with Him, including Mary (called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had come out. In addition, Joanna the wife of Cuza (the manager of Herod’s household) was with Him, as well as Susanna, and many others. These women helped support Jesus and the apostles out of their own means (Luke 7:2-3).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you get the impression that some of the Pharisees that invited Jesus to eat with them were wealthy men?
2. Why do you suppose it was that Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him?
3. Do you find fault with Jesus for allowing the woman to caress His feet? Please explain.
4. What did Jesus mean when He said that the woman's faith had saved her? Did He mean that her faith alone, without repentance, had saved her? Or did He mean that He exempted her from the normal rule of having to be baptized, as others had been? Or did He mean that she had been saved because she had heard the good news about the kingdom, repented of her sins, and been immersed for the forgiveness of her sins? What do you think?

35.

WAS JESUS IN HIS RIGHT MIND?

Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3: 20-30

When Jesus entered a certain house in Galilee, so many people came together in that house that He and His disciples could not even eat their food (Mark 3:20).

Some of the people brought to Jesus a demon-possessed man, who was both blind and mute. In spite of the man's severe disabilities, Jesus healed him so that he could both talk and see (Matthew 12:22).

All the people who witnessed this healing were astonished and some of them asked, "Could this be the Son of David" (Matthew 12:23 NIV)?

Now, about that same time, certain scribes (experts in the Law of Moses) had come down from Jerusalem to Galilee and brought with them the newest theory that the Pharisees had concocted to explain how Jesus was able to heal people. They said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (Mark 3:22 NIV).

When the Pharisees heard the people asking if Jesus were the Messiah (Son of David), the Pharisees replied, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons" (Matthew 12:24 NIV).

Jesus knew their thoughts (Matthew 12:25), and He had no difficulty refuting their charge. He called the scribes and Pharisees to Him and, by means of parables (Mark 3:23), showed them how ridiculous their explanation for the source of His miraculous power was. He asked,

“How can Satan drive out Satan?”

Mark 3:23 NIV

Then He said,

“Every kingdom divided against itself
will be ruined,
and every city or household
divided against itself
will not stand.”

Matthew 12:25 NIV

He said further,

“And if Satan opposes himself
and is divided,
he cannot stand; his end has come.”

Mark 3:26 NIV

Then Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees,

“And if I
drive out demons by Beelzebub,
by whom do your people drive them out?”

Matthew 12:27a NIV

He added,

“So then, they will be your judges.”

Matthew 12:27b NIV

The scribes and Pharisees were not drawing the right conclusion from what they were seeing. They should have realized that something of great importance was taking place in their day. Jesus said,

“But if I drive out demons
by the Spirit of God,
then the kingdom of God
has come upon you.”

Matthew 12:28 NIV

Unless Jesus had in some way bound Satan, He (Jesus) could not have been snatching people out of Satan’s kingdom. Jesus said,

“In fact, no one can enter
a strong man’s house
and carry off his possessions
unless he first ties up the strong man.
Then he can rob his house.”

Mark 3:27 NIV

Actually, while Jesus was gathering people, Satan was scattering them. Jesus said,

“He who is not with me
is against me,
and he who does not gather with me
scatters.”

Matthew 12: 30 NIV

So, the scribes and Pharisees were not only mistaken about the source of Jesus' power, they were also guilty of blasphemy. They were guilty of blasphemy because they ascribed Jesus' work through the Holy Spirit as being from the devil. Jesus said,

“Therefore I say to you,
every sin and blasphemy
will be forgiven men,
but the blasphemy against the Spirit
will not be forgiven men.
Anyone who speaks a word
against the Son of Man,
it will be forgiven him;
but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit,
it will not be forgiven him,
either in this age or in the age to come.”

Matthew 12:31-32 NKJV

The failure of the scribes and Pharisees to recognize what kind of a spirit was in Jesus demonstrated what kind of people they were. Jesus said,

“Make a tree good
and its fruit will be good,
or make a tree bad
and its fruit will be bad,
for a tree is recognized by its fruit.”

Matthew 12:33 NIV

Then Jesus castigated them, by saying,

“You brood of vipers,
how can you who are evil
say anything good?
For out of the overflow of the heart
the mouth speaks.”

Matthew 12:34 NIV

He explained,

“The good man brings good things
out of the good stored up in him,
and the evil man
brings evil things
out of the evil stored up in him.”

Matthew 12:35 NIV

Jesus warned that a day of reckoning would come. He said,

“But I tell you
that men will have to give account
on the day of judgment
for every careless word they have spoken.
For by your words
you will be acquitted,
and by your words you will be condemned.”

Matthew 12:36-37 NIV

While Jesus was teaching in this house, His family came to speak with Him. They had heard rumors about Him; and they had come to take charge of Him, because they thought He must be out of His mind (Mark 3:21).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you suppose Jesus' mother and brothers were hearing about Him that made them think they should come and take charge of Him (Mark 3:21)?
2. Who is "the strong man," to whom Jesus referred in Mark 3:27? In what way was Jesus robbing Him?
3. What is the sin of blasphemy? How does a person commit that sin?
4. It appears that the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In what way were they blaspheming the Holy Spirit? See Mark 3:30. Is it possible for people to blaspheme the Holy Spirit today?
5. Will people be called upon at the final Judgment to give account for the words that they have spoken? See Matthew 12:36-37?

36. THE SIGN OF JONAH and JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

Matthew 12:38-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21

Jesus was still in the house in Galilee, where He had healed a demon-possessed man that could neither see nor talk (Matthew 12:22-23).

He was speaking to the scribes and Pharisees about their sins and about the Judgment to come, but they seemed anxious to change the subject (Matthew 12:34-35). Some of them said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you” (Matthew 12:38).

By this time, Jesus may have grown weary of hearing such people ask for signs (miracles), for He responded harshly to their request. He said,

“A wicked and adulterous generation
asks for a miraculous sign!
But none will be given it
except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Matthew 12:39 NIV

Jesus then explained what He meant by the “the sign of the prophet Jonah.” He said,

“For as Jonah was
three days and three nights
in the belly of a huge fish,
so the Son of Man will be
three days and three nights

in the heart of the earth.”

Matthew 12:40 NIV

We, living on this side of the Cross of Jesus, are in a better position to understand Jesus’ allusion to “three days and three nights” than the people of His generation may have been.

Jesus contrasted the people of His generation with the people of Nineveh in the days of Jonah. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, but most of the people of Jesus’ generation had not repented at His preaching. Jesus said,

“The men of Nineveh will stand up
at the judgment with this generation
and condemn it;
for they repented at the preaching of Jonah,
and now one greater than Jonah is here.”

Matthew 12:41 NIV

Jesus spoke, next, of the Queen of Sheba, who showed respect for King Solomon and listened to His sayings (1 Kings 10:1-13). Jesus contrasted the respect that she showed to King Solomon with the lack of respect His generation was showing to Him. Jesus said,

“The Queen of the South will rise
at the judgment with this generation
and condemn it;
for she came from the ends of the earth
to listen to Solomon’s wisdom,

and now one greater than Solomon is here.”
Matthew 12:42 NIV

Jesus knew that, even though He was engaged in the most effective campaign that had ever been waged against evil, its effects in the lives of many people would be short lived. His generation would become just like it was before He appeared. He explained that,

“When an evil spirit comes out of a man,
it goes through arid places seeking rest
and does not find it.

Then it says,

‘I will return to the house I left.’

When it arrives,

it finds the house unoccupied,
swept clean and put in order.”

Matthew 12:43-44 NIV

An evil spirit is not content to resume living in its old house in the heart of a person, all by itself. It desires company. Jesus said,

“Then it goes and takes with it
seven other spirits more wicked than itself,
and they go in and live there.”

Matthew 45a NIV

Jesus foresaw the sad things that were in store for His generation and said,

“And the final condition of that man
is worse than the first.
That is how it will be
with this wicked generation.”

Matthew 12:45b NIV

Jesus mother and brothers had come to speak with Him (Matthew 12:47) and, possibly, to take charge of Him (Mark 3:21); but they could not even get close to Him because of the crowd (Luke 8:19). They were still standing outside the house and finally sent someone in to call Him (Mark 3:31).

On the inside of the house, a crowd was sitting around Jesus and someone said to Him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you” (Mark 3:32 NIV). Jesus replied,

“Who are my mother
and my brothers?”

Mark 3:33 NIV

Then He looked at those seated around him (Mark 3:34) and, pointing to His disciples, said,

“Here are my mother
and my brothers!”

Matthew 12:49 NIV

Then He added,

“For whoever does the will
of my Father in heaven

is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:50 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the scribes and Pharisees ask to see a sign from Jesus? What do you think? Why did He not give them a sign?
2. What was Jesus talking about when He said that the Son of Man would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40)?
3. How did “the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39) show that Jesus was the Messiah?
4. Did Jesus claim that He was greater than the prophet Jonah and greater than King Solomon (Matthew 12:41-42)? If He did, what do you make of that claim?
5. Did Jesus expect His generation of people to become better or to get worse, as time went on? See Matthew 12:45.
6. What did Jesus mean when He said that His disciples were His “mother and brothers” (Matthew 12:49)?
7. What did He mean when He said, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35)? Can people today be related to Jesus?

8. Why did Jesus' mother and brothers not take custody of Him as they had intended to do (Mark 3:21)? What do you think?

37.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15

In the afternoon of the day on which Jesus had already encountered Pharisees in two different homes, He went out and sat by the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 13:1).

As He sat there, people were coming to Him from town after town. Finally, there were so many people gathered that Jesus had to get into a boat, as He had done before; and He taught them from the boat while the people stood on the shore.

He had often taught in a figurative or allegorical way, but on this afternoon He decided to speak mostly in parables (stories).

Among the parables that Jesus told was a story of a farmer that went out to sow seed in a field. The story describes the way that people were responding to His message.

Jesus said that as the farmer was sowing his seed, some of the seed fell on the path and were trampled upon, and the birds came and ate them up.

Also, He said that some of the farmer's seed fell on rocky places, where there was not much soil. Although those seed sprang up quickly, the plants were scorched and they withered when the sun came up; because they were in shallow soil and did not have deep roots.

Again, He said that some of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Finally, He said that some of the seed fell on good ground, where they produced a crop that was 100, 60, or 30 times as much as was sown.

Then Jesus said,

“He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:9 NIV

After Jesus had told this parable, His disciples came to Him and asked Him why He was speaking in parables. Prior to this, He had spoken openly to the people.

Jesus explained that He was speaking in parables because knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven had been given only to them (His disciples) and not to people in general (Matthew 13:11).

Then He explained,

“Whoever has will be given more,
and he will have an abundance.

Whoever does not have,
even what he has will be taken from him.”

Matthew 13:12 NIV

Jesus knew that even though people saw what He did, they would not understand the significance of it; and even though they heard what He said, they would not know what He meant (Matthew 13:13). He found that the failure of people to comprehend in His day was just like it was in Isaiah’s day. God said through Isaiah,

“You will be ever hearing

but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing
but never perceiving.”

Matthew 13:14 NIV; Isaiah 6:9

Jesus quoted further what God said about the people in Isaiah’s day, for it described Jesus’ day as well. Jesus said,

“For this people’s heart
has become callused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.”

Matthew 13:15 NIV; Isaiah 6:10

What Jesus was saying and doing affected His disciples differently than it did people in general. He pointed out that what His disciples were seeing and hearing was a blessing to them. He said,

“But blessed are your eyes
because they see,
and your ears because they hear.”

Matthew 13:16 NIV

Then He added,

“For I tell you the truth,

many prophets and righteous men
 longed to see what you see
 but did not see it,
 and to hear what you hear
 but did not hear it.”

Matthew 13:17 NIV

Even Jesus’ disciples did not fully comprehend the Parable of the Sower; but they wanted to get it clear in their minds, so they asked Him what it meant.

He told them that the seed that was sown was “the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Then He explained to them the meaning of the seed that was sown on the path, by saying,

“Those along the path
 are the ones who hear,
 and then the devil comes
 and takes away the word from their hearts,
 so that they may not believe and be saved.”

Luke 8:12 NIV

He also explained what the rocky soil meant. He said.

“The one who received the seed
 that fell on rocky places
 is the man who hears the word
 and at once receives it with joy.
 But since he has no root,
 he lasts only a short time.
 When trouble or persecution comes
 because of the word,

he quickly falls away.”

Matthew 13:20-21 NIV

Next, He explained what the soil with the thorns meant. He said,

“The one who received the seed
that fell among the thorns
is the man who hears the word,
but the worries of this life
and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it,
making it unfruitful.”

Matthew 13:22 NIV

Jesus also explained about the good soil. He said,

“But the one who received the seed
that fell on good soil
is the man who hears the word
and understands it.
He produces a crop, yielding a hundred,
sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Matthew 13:23 NIV

Jesus seems to have taught this parable to describe how people were receiving His teaching. Some were receiving it well, but others were rejecting it; and they were rejecting it for a variety of reasons. It was important for the disciples to understand this, because they would be faced with similar situations.

As a trainer of teachers, Jesus faced the problem of how to teach His disciples with so many people present. One of the solutions He found was to teach in parables, which were hidden from the public but which were (hopefully) clear to His disciples.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What lesson (or lessons) can we learn from the Parable of the Sower? Does this parable tell us anything about how people will respond to our message today?
2. Do you consider it just (or fair) that to the people who already have, more will be given, and that from the people, who do not have much, what they have will be taken away from them? What does Matthew 13:12 actually mean? Who is responsible for taking the word of God away from people?
3. Why are the eyes and ears of some people closed, as regards the gospel? What is the cause for this?
4. What is the significance of the fact that the Word of God is the seed that Jesus sowed (taught)? What seed should we be sowing (teaching) today?

38.**THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS**

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of the Weeds describes the conflict that is going on between Jesus and the devil, and it foretells something of what the outcome of that conflict will be. It appears that Jesus told the Parable of the Weeds on the same day that He told the Parable of the Sower.

In the Parable of the Weeds, Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven, which He was working to advance, is like a man that sowed good seed in his field. While everyone slept, however, the man's enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away.

So when the wheat sprouted and produced grain, the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

The man replied, "An enemy did this."

Then the servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?"

"No," the man said, "Because in pulling up the weeds, you might also root out the wheat."

The man told his servants to let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest. He said that he would at that time tell the harvesters to pull up the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned. The man also said that he would tell the harvesters to gather the wheat into his barn.

Jesus did not teach the crowd anything that day without using parables (Matthew 13:34). Thus, He fulfilled a statement of Asaph (a psalmist and a prophet), who said,

“I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden
since the creation of the world.”

Matthew 13:35 NIV; Psalm 78:2

After Jesus had finished telling parables, He concluded His public speaking for the day and went into a certain house. It had been a long day for Him. His disciples came to Him in the house and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

Jesus began, at that, to explain the wide implications of the Parable of the Weeds. He explained, first of all, that the sower is “the Son of Man.” He said,

“The one who sowed the good seed
is the Son of Man.”

Matthew 13:37 NIV

Next, He explained that the field represents the world (Matthew 13:38a). That is to say, Jesus sowed good seed in the world. He said,

“And the good seed [crop] stands for
the sons of the kingdom.”

Matthew 13:38b NIV

Jesus sowed the “good seed” (His teaching) in order to produce a crop of good people for God’s kingdom. Some people, however, were opposing Jesus’ teaching. They were “weeds.” They were opposing Jesus’ teaching due to the work of the evil one (the devil). Jesus said,

“The weeds are the sons of the evil one,
and the enemy who sows them
is the devil.”

Matthew 13:38c-39a NIV

Many of Jesus’ parables teach only one thing, but this parable touches reality at several points. Jesus explained that the angels would be the ones that would take the “weeds” from the world. He also explained when the angels would take them. He said,

“The harvest is the end of the age,
and the harvesters are angels.”

Matthew 13:39b NIV

Jesus also explained what would happen to the “weeds,” once they have been taken from the world. He said,

“As the weeds are pulled up
and burned in the fire,
so it will be at the end of the age.”

Matthew 13:40 NIV

For a moment, Jesus looked away from the fate of the “weeds” that would be taken from the world. He foretold

would happen to “weeds” that might, perchance, be in the kingdom of God. He said,

“The Son of Man will send out his angels,
and they will weed out of his kingdom
everything that causes sin
and all who do evil.”

Matthew 13:41 NIV

Then Jesus explained that “weeds” taken out of the kingdom would fare no better than the “weeds” taken from the world. He said,

“They will throw them
into the fiery furnace,
where there will be weeping
and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 13:42 NIV

The “sons of the kingdom,” however, have a glorious future awaiting them! Jesus said,

“Then the righteous will shine
like the sun
in the kingdom of their Father.
He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:43 NIV

Jesus’ comments in this parable appear to be among His earliest remarks about how the conflict between good and evil would end.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Did Jesus think that some unseen force was causing people to oppose His work? Who (or what) was causing people to oppose it? See Matthew 13:39. Do you think there is some hidden cause for opposition to the gospel today?
2. Do you get the impression that Jesus thought that everyone in the world would one day be in the kingdom of heaven? Or did He think that the difference between the “sons of the kingdom” and the “sons of the evil one” would continue until the end of time? See Matthew 13:40-41.
3. Do you get the impression that Jesus thought that the “sons of the evil one” would be punished? See Matthew 13:42. Did He seem to think they would be lightly punished or severely punished?
4. Did Jesus seem to think that “the righteous” would be richly rewarded? See Matthew 13:43.

39.

ASSORTED PARABLES

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-52; Mark 4:21-34; Luke 8:16-18

It appears that on the same day that Jesus spoke the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Weeds, He also spoke several other, lesser parables. The other parables are lesser only in the sense that they are shorter. They are not lesser in significance.

THE PARABLE OF THE LAMPSTAND

Mark 4:21-23; Luke 8:16-18

One of Jesus' parables concerned putting a lamp on a lampstand, where it would give light to all that are in a house. He had already touched upon this in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:15), where it teaches and individuals should let their light shine. The parable teaches here that truth will come to light (Mark 4:22 and Luke 8:17).

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED GROWING OF ITSELF

Mark 4:26-29

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like when a man scatters seed in a field. The man goes to bed at night and sleeps, and he arises the next day. The seed grows even though the man does not know how it happens. Jesus said,

“All by itself
the soil produces grain
first the stalk, then the head,

then the full kernel in the head.”

Mark 4:28 NIV

Then He said,

“As soon as the grain is ripe,
he puts the sickle to it,
because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4:29 NIV

This parable illustrates that there is something inherent in the word of God that allows the kingdom of God to grow in the hearts of people when the word of God is faithfully taught.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Although it is the smallest of the seeds, when it grows it is the largest of the vegetables and becomes a tree; so that the birds of the heaven come and nest in its branches.

This parable describes the external growth of the kingdom.

THE PARABLE OF THE YEAST

Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until the whole was leavened.

This parable has two possible meanings. It may describe the leavening influence that the kingdom of heaven has on society, or it may describe the spiritual and moral development of people within the kingdom.

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

Matthew 13:44

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that was hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again; and he went with joy and sold all he had and bought the field.

This parable is about a person that unexpectedly comes across the kingdom of heaven and who wants to be in it so badly that he is willing to sacrifice all for it.

THE PARABLE OF THE BEAUTIFUL PEARL

Matthew 13:45-46

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant that was looking for beautiful pearls. When the merchant found a pearl of great value, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

This parable is about a person that is seeking the kingdom of heaven and is willing to give all that he has in order to be in it.

THE PARABLE OF THE NET

Matthew 13:47-50

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a net that is thrown into the sea and catches all kinds of fish. When

the net is full, the fishermen drag it onto the shore. Then they sit down and collect the good fish into baskets, but the bad fish they throw away. Jesus said,

“This is how it will be
at the end of the age.
The angels will come
and separate the wicked
from the righteous and throw them
into the fiery furnace,
where there will be weeping
and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 13:49-50 NIV

This parable is about the fact that all kinds of people are caught up in the gospel’s net. Some can be kept but others cannot be kept.

After Jesus spoke these parables, He asked His disciples, “Did you understand all these things?”

They said, “Yes.”

So He did not have to explain these parables to them.

THE PARABLE OF THE EXPERT IN THE LAW

Matthew 13:52

Although the day was growing long, Jesus told His disciples yet another parable. He said that every expert in the Law of Moses that has been instructed in things about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house, who brings out of his storeroom new treasures, as well as old treasures.

This parable is descriptive of the work that the apostles and others would do in preaching the gospel and teaching people the word of God. They would bring forth the (new) teaching of Jesus as well as what they found applicable from the Old Testament.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What is the message in the Parable of the Seed Growing by Itself (Mark 4:26-29)? What does the “seed” represent? See Luke 8:11. Must the seed be sown before a crop will grow?
2. What does the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19) tell about the growth of the kingdom of heaven?
3. What does the Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21) teach about the growth of the kingdom of heaven? Is the Parable of the Yeast in any way similar to the Parable of the Mustard Seed? In what way is it similar? Is it dissimilar in any way? If so, in what way?
4. Why did the man sell all that he had (Matthew 13:44) in order to buy the field with the treasure in it? Is there a lesson for us here? What is it?
5. Is the Parable of the Beautiful Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46) similar to the Parable of the Hidden Treasure? In what way is it similar or dissimilar?

6. What does the Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50) teach? Will God be able to keep every person that accepts the gospel? If not, why not?

40.

CALMING THE STORM

Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

It had been a long, hard day for Jesus. He had taught Pharisees and other religious leaders in one house and had eaten a meal with Pharisees in another. Later in the day, He had taught a number of parables to a crowd from a boat in the Sea of Galilee; and at the end of the day He had a conversation with His disciples in a house.

So it was late when Jesus said to His disciples “Let us cross over to the other side of the sea.”

Whereupon, the disciples dismissed the crowd and took Jesus in the boat with them just as He was (Mark 4:36), and Jesus fell asleep in the boat (Luke 8:23). There were also other boats that followed (Mark 4:36).

Without warning, a furious squall came up. The waves of the sea washed over the boat, and water began to fill it. All the while, Jesus was in the back of the boat asleep on a cushion (Mark 4:38).

The disciples came to Jesus and awakened Him, and exclaimed with great alarm, “Master, save us, don’t you care if we die?”

Jesus awoke and responded, “How fearful you are! O, you of little faith!”

Then He got up and rebuked the winds and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” As He said this, the winds died down and the sea became calm.

He asked His disciples,

“Why are you so afraid?”

Do you still have no faith?"

Mark 4:40 NIV

The disciples were terrified at all of this, and they asked each other with wonderment,

“What kind of man is this?

Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

Matthew 8:27 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you suppose Jesus wanted to cross over the sea because He wanted to get away from the crowd for a little rest? Does it disturb you that Jesus’ physical body got tired and that His nerves became frayed, as with other humans? Please explain.
2. Do you sense that Jesus’ miracles seemed to be getting more dramatic as time went on? Please elaborate on this.
3. When Jesus stilled the wind and the waves, did it seem to bring the disciples a step forward in their appreciation of the greatness of Jesus?
4. What was the source of Jesus’ confidence that they would be safe? Why did the disciples not yet share His confidence?

5. What does Jesus' ability to calm the storm tell you about Him?

41.

THE GADARENE DEMONIAK

Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39

After Jesus had calmed the storm, He and His apostles arrived at the region of the Gerasenes (Gadarenes), on the Eastern Shore. This was the first time, so far as we know, that Jesus had been in Gentile territory, after He began His public ministry.

As Jesus got out of the boat and was coming up on the land, a demon-possessed man, who had been living in tombs saw Jesus from afar and ran to meet Him. (Matthew 8:28 tells us that there were actually two demoniacs.)

The man that ran to Jesus had, in times past, been so violent that no one could pass that way; and for a long time he had not worn clothes or lived in a house. Sometimes an unclean spirit would seize him and drive him into solitary places, where night and day he would be heard crying out in the tombs and in the hills. He would also cut himself with rocks. Often he had been bound with chains and with foot irons, but he pulled the chains apart and broke the foot irons; and no one was able to tame him.

This man came and fell down before Jesus and cried with a loud voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me” (Luke 8:28 NIV)!

After Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man (Luke 8:29), He asked him, “What is your name?”

The man answered, “My name is ‘Legion’ for we are many.”

The unclean spirits that were in the man begged Jesus not to send them into the Abyss but to send them into the pigs, which were feeding on a hill nearby; and Jesus said, “Go.”

Then the unclean spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs; and the herd of about two thousand pigs came rushing down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea.

When those that had been tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported it to people both in the town and in the countryside; and the whole town came out to meet Jesus.

Then the herdsmen, who that had witnessed what had happened, explained it to the townspeople. When the townspeople saw the man that had been formerly demon-possessed sitting, dressed, and in his right mind, it scared them. So they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region, because they were afraid.

As Jesus was getting into the boat to leave, the formerly demon-possessed man begged Jesus to allow him to go with Him; but Jesus refused. Jesus told to him,

“Go to your home and to your people
and tell them how much
the Lord has done for you
and that He has had mercy on you.”

Mark 5:19

Then the man went on his way and began to proclaim in the cities of the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for

him, and everyone that heard the man was amazed at what he said.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Did you notice anything in this story that would suggest to you that the land of Gadarenes was not occupied by Israelites? What did you notice?
2. Jesus spoke to the demons in the man (or men). Do you think that we ought to try to speak to demons today? Do you think demons would obey us if we did? See Acts 19:13-17.
3. Why do you suppose Jesus did not permit the formerly demon-possessed man to go with Him?
4. Was it a good work that Jesus assigned the man to do (Mark 5:19)? Does his assignment give you any ideas as to what we might do? If so, what ideas?

42.**JAIRUS' DAUGHTER**

Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56

Now Jesus returned to Galilee, where He had been teaching the crowd, prior to His crossing the Sea to Gadara. The people were expecting Him, and they welcomed Him back (Luke 8:40).

The Disciples of John the Baptist came and asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting, as they and the Pharisees' disciples were doing (Matthew 9:14). This, being basically the same question that some of the people had asked Jesus at Matthew's feast (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33), Jesus gave essentially the same answer (Matthew 9:15-17) as He had given before (Mark 2:19-22; Luke 5:34-39).

While Jesus was teaching John's disciples about fasting, a man came with great urgency and interrupted Him (Matthew 9:18). The man was Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and pleaded with Him to come to his house. Jairus said to Jesus, "My daughter is on the point of death, but come and put your hand on her, and she will live." The sick girl was Jairus' only daughter, a girl of about twelve years of age.

So Jesus got up and went with the man, and His disciples came, too. As they were going along, the crowd pressed close around Jesus, and there was a woman in the crowd that had been bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered many things at the hands of many doctors and had spent everything that she had, but nothing helped. Instead of getting better, she only got worse. When she heard

about Jesus, she came to Him and touched the hem of His garment; and immediately, her bleeding stopped.

Jesus sensed that power had gone out from Him; and looking around to see who it was, He asked, “Who touched me?”

His disciples answered, “You see the people crowding around you and yet you ask, ‘Who touched me’ (Mark 5:31)?

When the woman saw that she could not remain unnoticed, she came and knelt down before Jesus and told Him the whole truth, in the presence of all the people.

Then Jesus said to her,

“Daughter, your faith has healed you.
Go in peace
and be freed from your suffering.”

Mark 5:34 NIV

While Jesus was still speaking with her, men came from the house of Jairus and said to Jairus, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher any more?”

Jesus ignored what they said and told Jairus,

“Don’t be afraid;
just believe,
and she will be healed.”

Luke 8:50 NIV

When Jesus arrived at Jairus’ house, He saw the flute players and heard the noisy mourners, and He said, “Go

away. The girl is not dead but asleep” (Matthew 9:24 NIV). They laughed at him, for they knew she was dead.

After He ushered them all out, He went in where the child was; and He allowed only the child’s parents and three of His disciples to go in with Him.

Then Jesus took the girl by the hand (Mark 5:41) and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (Little girl, I say to you, get up!).

Immediately, her spirit returned, and she stood up and walked about. At this, they were all completely astonished (Mark 5:42); and Jesus told them to give her something to eat (Mark 5:43).

He then gave them strict orders not to let anyone know what had happened (Mark 5:43). None-the-less, the news about the miracle spread throughout that region (Matthew 9:26).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Did you notice how willing Jesus was to go with Jairus and heal his daughter? What does this suggest to you about Jesus?
2. Did Jesus seem to have any doubts about whether or not He could heal Jairus’ daughter? What does this indicate to you?
3. When Jesus told the woman that her faith had healed her, did He mean that it was her faith by itself that had healed her, or did He mean that He and God had healed her because she had faith?

4. Why did Jesus not want Jairus and others to tell anyone that He had raised the little girl from the dead? What do you think?

43.

JESUS IN A SYNAGOGUE IN HIS “HOMETOWN”

Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left the place where Jairus and his family lived (Mark 6:1) and came to “His hometown” (Matthew 13:54 and Mark 6:1).

It is not clear whether the expression “His hometown” (or home place) refers to Nazareth or to Capernaum.

Nazareth, of course, was where Jesus grew up (Matthew 2:23); but Capernaum had become His adopted hometown (Matthew 4:13), and He made mission tours into the countryside from Capernaum.

If Nazareth is here intended, then it appears that Jesus went back there for a second time, even though the people of Nazareth had rejected Him once before (Luke 4:14-30).

Whether it was Nazareth or Capernaum, Jesus went into the synagogue on a Sabbath Day, as was His custom, and began to teach the people that were there (Mark 6:2).

Many of those who heard Him speak were amazed. They asked, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these powerful miracles” (Matthew 13:54)?

Thus, the people conceded that Jesus was both wise and powerful, but they were unable to view Him as the Messiah.

Some of the people appear to have found it difficult to accept that anyone from among their own number could possess such wisdom and powers, and they took offence at Him (Matthew 13:57). They asked,

“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?”

Isn't his mother's name Mary,
and aren't his brothers James,
Joseph, Simon and Judas?
Aren't all his sisters with us?
Where then did this man
get all these things?"

Matthew 13:55-56 NIV

Jesus responded to them in a way that is reminiscent of what He had said (earlier) (Luke 4:24) when He had been rejected at Nazareth. He said,

"Only in his hometown,
among his relatives
and in his own house
is a prophet without honor."

Mark 6:4 NIV

Matthew tells us that Jesus did not perform many powerful miracles there, because of their lack of faith (Matthew 13:58). Mark tells us that Jesus was not able to perform a single powerful miracle there, other than to heal a few sick people by laying His hands on them (Mark 6:5).

Mark also records that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith (Mark 6:6).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus was not able (Mark 6:5) to perform a single powerful miracle among the

people (that day). Why was Jesus not able? What do you think?

2. Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark, did not seem to regard Jesus' healing sick people to be of the same category as His more powerful miracles (Mark 6:5). Does that suggest that Jesus healed so many sick people that Mark did not consider His doing so to be unusual? What do you think?
3. Jesus was amazed at the people's lack of faith. Why was He amazed at their lack of faith? What do you think?
4. Were you aware that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55-56)? Were Jesus' brothers and sisters Mary's children? Was Joseph their father? What do you think?
5. The Gospels say that the people called Jesus "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55) or "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3). Did Jesus ever work at the carpentry trade? What do you think?

6.

44.

MISSION OF THE TWELVE

Matthew 9:35-10:22; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6

Jesus was going to all the towns and villages of Galilee (Matthew 9:35) and was teaching in their synagogues. He was preaching the gospel (good news) of the kingdom and healing every ill or disabled person that was brought to Him.

As He saw the crowds of people that were coming to Him, He was moved with compassion; for they were worn down and as helpless as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He remarked to His disciples,

“The harvest is plentiful
but the workers are few.”

Matthew 9:37 NIV

Then Jesus told His disciples to pray about the shortage of workers. He said,

“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest
to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Matthew 9:38 NKJV

Jesus had been training His disciples for months to do the same type of evangelistic work that He was doing and that John the Baptist had done, before John was imprisoned. Eventually, the time came for Jesus to send His disciples out to try their hand at spreading the gospel of the kingdom.

So Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of illnesses and disabilities (Matthew 10:1).

Before He sent them out, however, He instructed them to go only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6). That is, they were not to go among the Gentiles or into any town of the Samaritans. They should announce that the kingdom of heaven was near (Matthew 10:7), as John the Baptist had done and as Jesus was currently doing. He commissioned them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and to cast out demons. He also cautioned them not to charge money for their services. He said,

“Freely you have received,
freely give.”

Matthew 10:8b

He instructed them to make no preparations for their journey but to go just as they were. He cautioned them not to take any gold, silver, or copper coins in their pockets. Nor should they take along a bag, an extra tunic, sandals, or a staff (Matthew 10:9-10; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:3); for, as Jesus said, “the worker is worth his keep” (Matthew 10:10 NIV).

He told them that when they went into a town or a village they should find out who is worthy there and stay with that person until they left. As they entered a home, they should greet it, presumably by saying, “Shalom” (peace). If the home was worthy of their blessing of “peace,” peace would rest upon that home; but if it were

not worthy, their blessing would return to them (Matthew 10:12-13).

Jesus said that if anyone did not welcome them or did not listen to their words, they should shake the dust off their feet as they left that home or that town (Matthew 10:14). He predicted it would not go well on the Day of Judgment with any town that refused to hear their message. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
it will be more bearable
for Sodom and Gomorrah
on the day of judgment than for that town.”
Matthew 9:15 NIV

Then Jesus warned His apostles,

“I am sending you out
like sheep among wolves.
Therefore be as shrewd as snakes
and as innocent as doves.”
Matthew 10:16 NIV

He forewarned that they would be persecuted (Matthew 10:17) and led before rulers and kings for His sake as a witness to them and to the nations (Matthew 10:18). He told them not to worry, however, about what they should say, because it would be given them in that hour (Matthew 10:19), for the Spirit of the Father would be speaking by them (Matthew 10:20).

He warned that a brother would deliver up a brother to death, and a father a child and that children would rise up against their parents and kill them (Matthew 10:21). He said,

“All men will hate you because of me,
but he who stands firm to the end
will be saved.”

Matthew 10:22 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Can you think of any reason why Jesus sent His Twelve Apostles only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel?” Please share your thoughts.
2. Why do you suppose Jesus did not want His apostles to make any preparations for their first mission-journey but to go just as they were? What do you think the reason was?
3. Do the restrictions that Jesus placed on His apostles apply to missionaries today? That is, are they instructed not to take anything with them? See Luke 22:35-36.
4. Jesus instructed His apostles not to charge money for their services? Why do you suppose He did not want them to charge?
5. Jesus told His apostles that the Holy Spirit would give them what they should say when they were called before

kings and rulers (Matthew 10:19-20). Does that promise apply to Jesus' followers today? What do you think?

45.
MORE ADVICE FOR THE TWELVE
Matthew 10:23-42

As Jesus continued speaking to His Twelve Apostles, He forewarned them of the dangers they would face on their mission. He did not want them to die needlessly, so He told them that if they were persecuted in one town, they should flee to another (Matthew 10:23a).

Due to the fact that the kingdom of God was coming so soon, however, He told them that they would not finish evangelizing the cities of Israel before it would be established. Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth,
you will not finish
going through the cities of Israel
before the Son of Man comes.”

Matthew 10:23b NIV

Jesus reminded His apostles that a pupil is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master (Matthew 10:24). Therefore, a pupil should not expect to be treated better than his teacher nor a servant better than his master (Matthew 10:25a). He said further,

“If the head of the house
has been called Beelzebub,
how much more

the members of his household!”

Matthew 10:25b NIV

Jesus assured His apostles that everything that He had told them in darkness (privately) would come to light (Matthew 10:26). Indeed, they should proclaim it from the housetops (Matthew 10:27).

He admonished them not to be afraid, saying,

“Do not be afraid of those
who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather, be afraid of the One
who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Matthew 10:28 NIV

Jesus wanted His apostles to understand that they were precious in God’s sight. He asked them, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?” Yet not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God’s knowing it (Matthew 10:29). He told them that even the hairs of their head were numbered (Matthew 10:30). Then He said,

“So don’t be afraid;
you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Matthew 10:31 NIV

After having said this, Jesus spoke of the reward that His apostles would receive:

“Whoever acknowledges me

before men,
I will also acknowledge him
before my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 10:32 NIV

Jesus warned them that there would also be a reverse side to this, namely,

“But whoever disowns me before men,
I will disown him
before my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 10:33 NIV

At this point, Jesus described the disruptive effect that His teaching would have upon society. He said,

“Do not suppose that I have come
to bring peace to the earth.
I did not come to bring peace,
but a sword.”

Matthew 10:34 NIV

Jesus then quoted a passage from the prophet Micah, which expressed how disruptive God’s message can be. The passage says,

“For I have come to turn
‘a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law
against her mother-in-law--
a man's enemies will be the members
of his own household.'"

Matthew 10:35-36; Micah 7:6 NIV

Yet, in spite of the possibility that this could happen,
people need to be brought to a decision. Jesus said,

"Anyone who loves his father or mother
more than me is not worthy of me;
anyone who loves his son or daughter
more than me is not worthy of me."

Matthew 10:37 NIV

Jesus continued,

"And anyone who does not
take his cross and follow me
is not worthy of me."

Matthew 10:38 NIV

In addition, Jesus promised,

"Whoever finds his life will lose it,
and whoever loses his life
for my sake will find it."

Matthew 10:39 NIV

Jesus closed His instructions to His apostles with a few words about the importance of their work. He said,

“He who receives you receives me,
and he who receives me
receives the one who sent me.”

Matthew 10:40 NIV

Jesus promised that any person that receives a prophet, in the name of a prophet, would get a prophet’s reward. He also said that if any person receives a just person, in the name of a just person, that person will get a just person’s reward (Matthew 10:41). Then He said,

“And if anyone gives
even a cup of cold water
to one of these little ones
because he is my disciple,
I tell you the truth,
he will certainly not lose his reward.”

Matthew 10:42 NIV

After He had finished saying these things, Jesus sent His apostles out, two by two; and they went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere (Luke 9:6).

Jesus, also, went from that place teaching and preaching in the towns of Galilee, without His apostles (Matthew 11:1).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did Jesus mean when He said (Matthew 10:31) that His disciples were worth more than many sparrows? Do you feel that you are worth more than many sparrows?
2. What did Jesus mean when He told His disciples (Matthew 10:30) that the hairs of their head were numbered? Do you think the hairs of your head are numbered?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said (Matthew 10:34) that He did not come to bring peace but a sword?
4. Why is a person that loves father or mother, son or daughter more than he loves Jesus (Matthew 10:37) not worthy of Jesus?
5. Why is a person that does not take up his cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 10:38) not worthy of Him? Does every person have a cross to bear?
6. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39)?

46.
HEALING BY THE POOL IN JERUSALEM
John 5:1-30

Amidst all the activities in Galilee, Jesus made a quick trip (south) to Jerusalem for one of the feasts (John 5:1). The Gospels do not tell us which feast it was.

When Jesus got to Jerusalem, He found a great number of disabled persons lying beside a pool called “Bethesda,” near the Sheep Gate. The pool had five covered colonnades surrounding it, and one of the persons that was lying there was a man who had been there for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw the man and learned that he had been for such a long time in that condition, He asked the man, “Do you want to get well?”

The man replied, “Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone goes down ahead of me.”

Some (not-very-early) manuscripts of the Gospel of John say (John 5:4) that at certain times an angel caused an agitation of the water in the pool and that the first person to get into the pool would be healed.

Jesus said to the man, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At that, the man was cured, and he picked up his mat and walked.

This happened on a Sabbath; and people in Jerusalem saw the man carrying his mat and said to him, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat!”

The man tried to defend himself by explaining, “The one who healed me said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

Upon hearing this, the people wanted to know who it was that had healed him on the Sabbath. This they considered to be a breach of the law; but the man did not know who it was, because Jesus had moved on in the crowd.

Jesus found the man later on the temple grounds and said to him,

“See,
you are well again.
Stop sinning
lest something worse happen to you.”

John 5:14

The man went straight to the people that had asked who had healed him and reported to them that it was Jesus.

Then the religious leaders started persecuting Jesus. They did so, because breaking the Sabbath was considered to be a serious matter in Jerusalem in those days. The Old Testament prescribes death by stoning for anyone that broke the Sabbath (Numbers 15:35), and the people in Jesus' day were rabid about enforcing this law.

So they came to Jesus and called upon Him to give an account for His having healed on the Sabbath. Jesus explained His action by saying,

“My Father is working until now,
and I Myself am working.”

John 5:17 NAS

This explanation did not satisfy the religious leaders. They wanted all the more to kill Jesus, not only because He

(according to their interpretation) broke the Sabbath, but also because He said that God was his own Father, thus making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Jesus could have let the issue of His relationship with the Father drop and have gone quietly back to Galilee; but, instead, chose to respond to His critics.

He explained to them that it is only natural for a son to imitate his father (John 5:19), for a father loves his son and shows him what he does (John 5:20). This implied that God had shown Jesus to heal on the Sabbath. God had shown it to Him by the fact that He (God) also heals on the Sabbath.

Jesus said that the Father would show Him even greater things, so much that they would be amazed (John 5:20). He began then to describe some of the “greater things” that God would show Him. He said,

“For just as the Father raises the dead
and gives them life,
even so the Son gives life
to whom he is pleased to give it.”

John 5:21 NIV

One would think that by saying this, Jesus would have reached the ultimate in identifying Himself with the Father; but no, there was more. He explained that the Father would entrust to Him even the final Judgment. He said,

“Moreover, the Father judges no one,
but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”

John 5:22 NIV

The reason why the Father intends to entrust the final Judgment to the Son is so that all people may come to honor the Son as they honor the Father (John 5:23).

In spite of God's desire that the Son be honored, Jesus' accusers were not honoring Jesus. The real reason that they were not honoring Jesus was that they did not honor the Father, who had sent Him (John 5:23).

Jesus appealed to His accusers to believe what He said. They should believe for their own benefit. He urged,

“I tell you the truth,
whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life
and will not be condemned;
he has crossed over from death to life.”

John 4:24 NIV

Jesus then described the role that He would play in the resurrecting of the dead. He said that the dead would hear His voice and that those who hear Him would live (John 5:25).

He said, further, that since He is the “Son of Man,” the Father had given Him the authority to judge and had made it possible for Him to have life in Himself (John 5:26-27). Jesus cautioned them,

“Do not be amazed at this,
for a time is coming
when all who are in their graves
will hear his voice and come out

-those who have done good will rise to live,
and those who have done evil
will rise to be condemned.”

John 5:28-29 NIV

Jesus explained to His accusers that He did not seek to please Himself, but to please the Father who had sent Him. He said,

“By myself I can do nothing;
I judge only as I hear,
and my judgment is just,
for I seek not to please myself
but him who sent me.”

John 5:30 NIV

It is astonishing that Jesus spoke so openly about His relationship with God. He must, surely, have known that His accusers would use what He said against Him; but perhaps it did not matter, since they were already seeking to kill Him

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think the man by the pool was sick because of the sins he had committed? What prompts you to think as you do? Are illnesses always related to the sins that people commit? See John 9:3.
2. Do you think that Jesus actually broke the Sabbath law by healing a man on the Sabbath, or was it only their traditions that He broke?

3. Do you think the man whom Jesus healed was malicious in reporting to the religious leaders that it was Jesus who had healed Him, or was he just unthinking?
4. Will Jesus be involved in resurrecting people from the dead? See John 5:25.
5. Will Jesus be involved in judging people at the Final Judgment? See John 5:27-28.

47.

JESUS' EVIDENCE FOR HIS MESSIAHSHIP

John 5:31-47

The religious leaders in Jerusalem started interrogating Jesus because He had healed a man on the Sabbath (John 5:8). Jesus explained to them (John 5:16-30) that His Father, God, was the source of His authority to heal on the Sabbath.

His explanation, however, fell on deaf ears; because they were not willing to concede that He was the Messiah.

For that reason, what He said about His close relationship with God sounded like blasphemy to them. It made them want, all the more, to put Him to death; for blasphemy was also punishable by death under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 24:14), as was Sabbath-breaking.

Knowing that His accusers needed to see evidence for His claim to be the Messiah, Jesus proceeded to lay out for them an argument in His defense.

He conceded that if He were the only one bearing witness, His witness would not stand in court (John 5:31); but He said that there was another person who bore witness to Him, namely, John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was still out in the wilderness, calling people to repentance and baptizing them and telling them that Jesus was the Messiah. Then Jesus said that He (Jesus) knew that John's witness was true (John 5:32).

The religious leaders, who were questioning Jesus may have been the very men that had sent emissaries to ask John the Baptist if he (John) were the Messiah; and John

had told them that not he (John 1:19-20) but Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:29,36). Jesus said,

“You have sent to John
and he has testified to the truth.”

John 5:33 NIV

Jesus assured them that for Himself He did not need the testimony of any man in order to know that He was the Messiah (John 5:34) but that He had brought the subject of John’s testimony up solely for the benefit of those who were questioning Him. He brought it up so that they might be saved (John 5:34).

Jesus said that they (His accusers) had wanted for a time to bask in John’s light, for John the Baptist was a burning and shining lamp (John 5:35). Now they seemed not to think as much of John as before. The testimony of John the Baptist, however, was the first argument that Jesus made in His defense.

Jesus assured them that He had yet another proof, greater than the testimony of John the Baptist, namely, His miracles. He said,

“But the testimony which I have
is greater than the testimony of John;
for the works which the Father has given Me
to accomplish--the very works that I do—
testify about Me,
that the Father has sent Me”

John 5:36 NASU

Jesus' accusers were well acquainted with the fact that Jesus had been doing miracles; for they could not dispute that He had cured a man that had been a cripple in their city for thirty-eight years (John 5:9). Jesus referred to His miracles as His second argument.

Jesus' third argument was that the Father Himself had given witness to Him (John 5:37). Jesus was referring, no doubt, to the voice from Heaven, which had said at His baptism, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17 NKJV).

Jesus' accusers could have checked it out, if they had cared to do so, whether or not such a voice had been heard from heaven. John the Baptist would have been pleased to tell them all about it. Chances are, however, they already knew that a voice had been heard at Jesus' baptism but were discounting that fact.

Jesus realized, at some point, that His words were having no effect on His accusers. So He told them that they were not in a position to judge the matter of His messiahship, since they had never heard God's voice nor ever seen God's form (John 5:37). He also told them that they did not have God's word residing in them, otherwise they would have believed the one whom God had sent (John 5:38).

This brought Jesus to His fourth argument: Namely, the Old Testament Scriptures. He said,

"You diligently study the Scriptures
because you think that by them
you possess eternal life.
These are the Scriptures

that testify about me,
yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

John 5:39-40 NIV

Indeed, the Old Testament Scriptures could have helped Jesus' accusers find eternal life, because they (the Old Testament Scriptures) point to Jesus, in whom life is to be found.

Jesus told His critics that He was not seeking their praise (John 5:41), because He knew what kind of men they were. He accused them of not having the love of God in their hearts (John 5:41-42).

Jesus said that even though He had come in His Father's name and not in His own name, they did not accept Him. He said that if another person were to come in his own name, Him they would accept (John 5:43).

Jesus was well aware that they loved the praise of men, so He asked them,

“How can you believe,
who receive honor from one another,
and do not seek the honor
that comes from the only God?”

John 5:44 NKJV

Jesus told His critics that He would not be the one to accuse them before the Father (John 5:45a). He said,

“Your accuser is Moses,
on whom your hopes are set.
If you believed Moses,

you would believe me,
for he wrote about me.”

John 5:45b-46 NIV

Then Jesus further said,

“But since you do not believe
what he [Moses]wrote,
how are you going to believe what I say?”

John 5:47 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why was it so difficult for the religious leaders in Jerusalem to believe in Jesus? Do religious leaders face similar difficulties today?
2. Do you think it is difficult for anyone to believe in Jesus who wants to be great or famous in the eyes of others?
3. What passage was Jesus referring to when He said that Moses had spoken of Him? Was He referring to Deuteronomy 18:15-19?
4. Are there any additional arguments that could be used in support of Jesus, other than the ones Jesus used? Please name some of them if you can.

48.

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9

John the Baptist was opposed to the marriage of King Herod Antipas to Herodias, the wife of his half-brother, Herod Philip. Because John the Baptist spoke out against the marriage, Herod Antipas had John arrested and thrown into prison.

Herod was king, not only over Galilee, but also over Peraea. Peraea was the strip of land along the east bank of the Jordan River, where John the Baptist had been baptizing.

All the while that King Herod held John in prison, Jesus was going about His work in Galilee, teaching and healing people.

Herodias, the wife of King Herod, was angry with John the Baptist and wanted to have John put to death; but she was unable to arrange it (Mark 6:19), because King Herod feared John. Earlier, King Herod had himself wanted to kill John; but he was afraid of the people, who held John to be a prophet (Matthew 14:5).

Herod protected John because he knew that John was a holy man (Mark 6:20), and he liked to hear him speak. He heard him speak from time to time in spite of the fact that when he heard him, he was greatly disturbed by what he heard (Mark 6:20).

When King Herod's birthday came around, Herod gave a banquet for his high officials, the military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee (Mark 6:21).

The entertainment at the banquet included a dance by Herodias' daughter. Her dance pleased Herod and his guests so much that Herod said to her, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you, up to half my kingdom" (Mark 6:23).

Whereupon, the girl went out and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

Herodias answered, "The head of John the Baptist."

So the girl hurried back to Herod with her shocking request. She said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist" (Matthew 14:8 NIV).

King Herod was greatly distressed when he heard her request, yet he did not refuse the girl because of his oath and because of his dinner guests (Mark 6:26). So he sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

The executioner went and beheaded John in the prison (Matthew 14:10) and brought John's head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother (Mark 6:28).

When John's disciples heard this, they came and took John's body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:29); and then they went and told Jesus about it (Matthew 14:12).

King Herod was, at a later date, perplexed when he heard people saying that Jesus was none other than John the Baptist, who had been raised from the dead (Luke 9:7-8).

Herod himself came to hold that same opinion about Jesus. He said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead" (Mark 6:14)! Herod tried to arrange to see Jesus (Luke 9:9).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think John the Baptist should have kept quiet about his opposition to King Herod Antipas' marriage to his own sister-in-law, or was he right to have spoken out about it?
2. Do you think Herod was a weak person? Do you think Herod was drunk when he issued the order to take John's life? Do you think that Herodias was the dominant person in their marriage and that she controlled Herod?
3. Was John the Baptist a martyr in the interest of the sanctity of marriage? What can we do today to increase the awareness of the sanctity of marriage?
4. Why do you think John's disciples went to Jesus and told Him about John's death?
5. What do you suppose Jesus thought about the execution of John the Baptist? What do you imagine Jesus could have said in prayer to His Father about John's execution?

49.**FEEDING THE 5,000**

Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17;
John 6:1-15

Jesus was not idle while His apostles were away on their first mission-journey. He was healing the sick and many people were following Him and He was, no doubt, also teaching them.

It appears that Jesus' twelve apostles returned shortly after John the Baptist's disciples had come and told Jesus that John had been beheaded in prison. Jesus may have preferred to be by Himself for a while and to talk with God about what had happened to John the Baptist and about what might lie in the future for Himself; but He could not get away, for there were too many people around Him.

His apostles also gathered around Him and reported all that they had said and done on their journey. So many people were coming and going that Jesus and His apostles could not even find time to eat; so He said to His apostles,

“Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place and get some rest”

Mark 6:31 NIV

So, they got into a boat and went away to a solitary place near the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where they hoped to be by themselves.

Many people from the towns saw Jesus and His apostles leave. They ran along the shore toward where

Jesus and His apostles appeared to be going, and they got there ahead of them.

When Jesus and the apostles landed, they did not find the peace and quiet that Jesus had been seeking. Instead, they found a large crowd of people waiting for Jesus. However, He was not upset with them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He went up on the hillside and sat down with His disciples and began to teach the people many things about the kingdom of God, and He also healed their sick.

Later that day, Jesus' disciples came to Him and said, "This is a remote place and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat" (Mark 6:35-36 NIV).

Jesus replied, "You give them something to eat."

Jesus looked up and saw people still coming to Him, and He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat" (John 6:5 NIV)? Jesus asked this to test Philip, for Jesus already knew what He was going to do.

Philip answered, "Eight months' wages wouldn't buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. Should we go and spend that much money on bread for them" (John 6:7)?

"How many loaves do you have?" He asked. "Go and see" (Mark 6:38 NIV).

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, and said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many" (John 6:8)?

"Bring them here to me," Jesus said.

Now, there was plenty of grass at that place, so Jesus told His disciples to tell the people to sit on the grass; and they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus blessed the bread (gave thanks); then He broke the loaves and gave them to His disciples to set before the people. Afterwards, He divided the two fish among them all.

When all the people had had enough to eat, Jesus said to His disciples,

“Gather the pieces that are left over.
Let nothing be wasted.”

John 6:12 NIV

So they gathered the pieces and filled twelve baskets with the pieces that were left over.

Immediately following this, Jesus instructed His apostles to get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd.

After the people had seen the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say,

“Surely this is the Prophet
who is to come into the world.”

John 6:14 NIV

Jesus knew that they intended to come and try to force Him to become their king (John 6:15). Had that happened, it would have been disastrous. It would have meant rebellion against Rome; and Rome would surely have sent

soldiers to put down the rebellion with the sword. Besides, their idea of a kingdom was not the type of kingdom that Jesus had in mind; so He withdrew to a mountain by Himself to pray.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you make of the fact that Jesus and His disciples had no food with them? Were they accustomed to going long periods of time without food? Did Jesus ever perform a miracle, so far as you know, to provide food for Himself or His disciples?
2. Should we follow Jesus' example of giving thanks for our food before (or after) we eat? What should we say in prayer regarding the food we eat?
3. What do you suppose Jesus' motives were in telling His disciples to pick up the pieces of food that were left over? What can we learn from that?
4. The people said, "Surely this is the Prophet, who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). Were they referring to the "prophet" of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18:18-19? What do you think?
5. Why did Jesus not allow these people to make Him their king? What kind of a king did they want Jesus to be? What to you think? Was this the first time that Jesus had been offered an earthly kingdom?

50.**WALKING ON WATER and HEALING AT
GENNESARET**

Matthew 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21

No one knows exactly where it was that Jesus fed the 5000, but some people think it was on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, just south of the town of Bethsaida.

After Jesus had fed the 5,000, He sent His apostles on ahead of Him by boat to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). Then He sent the crowd away and went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray (Matthew 14:23); and He was there until early the next morning.

In the meanwhile, His disciples were in the boat about three and a half miles from land, and the wind was blowing hard, and the waves were buffeting them. As a result, it was hard making headway, because the winds were against them.

Between three and six o'clock in the morning, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea (Matthew 14:25); and He saw them straining at the oars (Mark 6:48).

They also saw Jesus approaching, walking on the water. He appeared to be about to pass them by, when they cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" (Matthew 14:26).

Jesus, however, immediately spoke to them and said,

"Take courage! It is I.
Don't be afraid"

Matthew 14:27 NIV

Then Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28 NKJV).

Jesus said, “Come.”

So Peter climbed down out of the boat. He walked on the water and came toward Jesus; but when Peter noticed the strong wind (Matthew 14:30), he got scared and began to sink. He cried out, “Lord, save me” (Matthew 14:30)!

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught hold of Peter and said to him,

“Oh, you of little faith,
why did you doubt?”

Matthew 14:31

Then the disciples desired to take Jesus into the boat with them (John 6:21).

After Jesus and Peter had climbed into the boat, the wind died down. This caused the disciples to be completely amazed, for they had not yet understood the implications of the fact that Jesus had fed 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread (Mark 6:51). The reason they had not understood about the bread was because their hearts were still hardened (Mark 6:52).

Then, those in the boat bowed down before Jesus, saying,

“Truly you are the Son of God.”

Matthew 14:33

Very shortly after this, the boat reached the shore, a little beyond Bethsaida. They anchored at a place called,

Gennesaret, which was a little field on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, just south of Capernaum.

As soon as they got out of the boat, the people there recognized Jesus, and they quickly sent word to all the surrounding countryside that Jesus was present.

It had become customary for people to bring all their sick people to Jesus whenever He went into any village, town, or countryside. They placed their sick in the marketplaces and begged Him to let them just touch the edge of His garment; and everyone that touched Him was healed (Mark 6:56).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Would you consider Jesus' walking on water to be one of His most outstanding miracles? What are some of His other outstanding miracles?
2. Why did Peter begin to sink after he took a few steps on the water? What can we learn from that?
3. The Gospel of Mark says that the apostles did not yet understand about the loaves and fishes (Mark 6:52). If they had understood about the loaves and fishes, how would that have helped them know what to think about Jesus' walking on the water and about the wind and waves dying down as He got into the boat?

51.
A CONVERSATION WITH THE PEOPLE FROM
TIBERIAS

John 6:23-40

Certain people from Tiberias came across the Sea of Galilee in several boats and landed near where Jesus had fed the 5,000; but He and His disciples had already left that place. So the people got back in their boats and went on to Capernaum in search of Him.

When they found Him, they asked him, “Rabbi (Teacher), when did you get here” (John 6:25)?

Jesus knew immediately what these people had in mind. They wanted Jesus to give them some more of the bread that He could provide by miraculous means. Jesus responded to them by saying,

“I tell you the truth,
you are looking for me,
not because you saw miraculous signs
but because you ate the loaves
and had your fill.”

John 6:26 NIV

Jesus cautioned them, therefore, not to seek physical food as the main thing in life but to seek food for eternal life. He said,

“Do not work for food that spoils,
but for food that endures to eternal life,
which the Son of Man will give you.

On him God the Father has placed
his seal of approval.”

John 6:27 NIV

The people from Tiberias were not sure what it was that Jesus wanted them to do. So they asked, “What must we do in order to be doing the works of God” (John 6:28 RSV)?

Jesus answered,

“The work of God is this:
to believe in the one he has sent.”

John 6:29 NIV

When the people heard this, they thought they saw a way to induce Jesus to give them bread. They asked Him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do” (John 6:30 NIV)?

Then they buttressed their request by saying, “Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (John 6: 31 NIV).

Jesus corrected their reference to history, by saying,

“I tell you the truth,
it is not Moses who has given you
the bread from heaven,
but it is my Father
who gives you the true bread from heaven.”

John 6:32 NIV

Jesus then identified for them the “bread from heaven,” or the “bread of God.” He said,

“For the bread of God
is he who comes down from heaven
and gives life to the world.”

John 6:32-33 NIV

It was entirely appropriate for Jesus to refer to Himself as the “bread of God,” because He is the one who came down from heaven and also because He is the one who can give life to the world.

The people may not have been sure what Jesus was offering them; but whatever it was, they wanted it. They requested, “Sir, give us this bread from now on” (John 6:34),

Jesus tried to make His meaning a little more specific, by declaring to them,

“I am the bread of life.
He who comes to me
will never go hungry,
and he who believes in me
will never be thirsty.”

John 6:35 NIV

The people from Tiberias did not really believe what Jesus was saying. This is shown by the fact that Jesus reproached them for not believing even though they had seen Him (John 6:36).

Their unbelief made it obvious that they were not among the ones whom God had given to Jesus to be His followers. So He said,

“All that the Father gives me
will come to me,
and whoever comes to me
I will never drive away.”

John 6:37 NIV

It must have been a disappointment for Jesus to face the fact that not everyone was willing to believe in Him and could not, for that reason, be counted among His disciples. No matter how great the disappointment may have been, He still wanted to do what God had sent Him to do. He explained,

“For I have come down from heaven
not to do my will
but to do the will of him who sent me.”

John 6:38 NIV

It was not God’s will, of course, that Jesus lose any one of those whom God had given Him (John 6:39). He said,

“For my Father’s will is that everyone
who looks to the Son
and believes in him
shall have eternal life,
and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:40 NIV

It seems that some of this rather long conversation (possibly, as much of it as we have looked at so far) took place in or near the town of Capernaum, where Jesus encountered the people from Tiberias.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. When the people from Tiberias asked Jesus to give them bread from heaven from then on (John 6:34), were they asking for Jesus to be with them always? Or were they asking to have the truth of His word always? Or were they asking to have physical bread from heaven always? What do you think they were asking?
2. What does it mean to “look to the Son” and to “believe in him” (John 6:40)? How can a person know if he is looking to the Son and believing in Him?
3. Did you notice that Jesus said that He would raise the dead? Did He say that He would raise the dead on a specific day? On which day will He raise the dead? See John 6:39-40.

52.

MORE TEACHING ABOUT “THE BREAD OF LIFE” IN A SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM

John 6:41-71

This is a continuation of the long conversation that Jesus’ had with people who had come from Tiberias. The following part of the conversation took place in a synagogue at Capernaum (John 6:59).

Some of the people were grumbling (John 6:41) that Jesus had implied (John 6:32-33,35) that He was the true bread that had come down from heaven. Their comment was, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’” (John 6:42 NIV)?

The people who grumbled did not understand what Jesus had meant when He said. “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).

Their grumbling showed that they were not willing to allow God to lead them to Jesus. If they had been willing, they would have gotten much more from Jesus than a loaf of bread. He said to them,

“Do not grumble among yourselves.
No one can come to Me,
unless the Father who sent Me draws him;
and I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:43-44 NAS

Had they been more familiar with the Old Testament, and had they believed it and lived by it, God could have led

them to Jesus; and He would have instructed them further. Jesus said.

“It is written in the Prophets:
‘They will all be taught by God.’
Everyone who listens to the Father
and learns from him comes to me.”

John 6:45 NIV; Isaiah 54:13

Due to Jesus’ close relationship with the Father, He is not only able to instruct those who come to Him, but He is also able to give them life. He said,

“No one has seen the Father
except the one who is from God;
only he has seen the Father.
I tell you the truth,
he who believes has everlasting life.
I am the bread of life.”

John 6:46-48 NIV

Jesus was trying to lead these people away from the notion that physical bread can, by itself, sustain life. Not even the manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness could sustain life forever. Jesus, however, can give everlasting life; for He is the one who will raise the dead on the last day. Therefore, He is the true “bread of life.” He said,

“Your forefathers ate the manna
in the desert, yet they died.

But here is the bread
that comes down from heaven,
which a man may eat and not die.”

John 6:49-50 NIV

Indeed, Jesus is far greater than physical bread, in that He is “living.” He said,

“I am the living bread
that came down from heaven.”

John 6:51a NIV

Carrying the metaphor further, Jesus said,

“If anyone eats of this bread,
he will live forever.
This bread is my flesh,
which I will give for the life of the world.”

John 6:51b NIV

Since the people did not understand, they began to argue sharply among themselves. Some were saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat” (John 6:52)?

In spite of their lack of understanding, Jesus pressed His metaphor still further. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood,
you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood
has eternal life,
and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:53-54 NIV

Continuing this, He said,

“For my flesh is real food
and my blood is real drink.
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood
remains in me, and I in him.”

John 6:55-56 NIV

Those people needed, first of all, to consume Jesus’ word, to imbibe His teaching, and to accept His challenge. If they could have done that, all other blessings would have flowed to them, even eternal life. Jesus said,

“Just as the living Father sent me
and I live because of the Father,
so the one who feeds on me
will live because of me.”

John 6:57 NIV

Summing up, then, Jesus said,

“This is the bread
that came down from heaven.
Your forefathers ate manna and died,
but he who feeds on this bread
will live forever.”

John 6:58 NIV

Even some of Jesus' disciples had trouble with Jesus' having compared Himself to physical bread and also with the idea that He had come down from heaven. They remarked, "This is a difficult teaching. Who can accept it" (John 6:60)?

When Jesus became aware that even His disciples were upset by what He had said, He asked them,

"Does this offend you?
What if you see the Son of Man ascend
to where he was before!"

John 6:61b-62 NIV

Jesus then explained that He had not been speaking literally about eating His flesh. He said,

"The Spirit gives life;
the flesh counts for nothing.
The words I have spoken to you
are spirit and they are life.
Yet there are some of you
who do not believe."

John 6:63-64 NIV

At this point in the narrative, the apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, mentioned that Jesus had known from the beginning which of His followers did not truly believe in Him (John 6:64). It was because of this that Jesus had said (John 6:44) that no one could come to Him unless it be given him from the Father (John 6:65).

This teaching may have been too difficult even for some of Jesus' followers to grasp. As a result, many of them turned back and followed Him no longer (John 6:66).

So Jesus asked the Twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you" (John 6:67)?

Simon Peter answered,

"Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
We believe and know
that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:68-69 NIV

Then Jesus replied, "Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil" (John 6:70 ASV)? Jesus was speaking, of course, of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who would betray Him (John 6:71).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think that Joseph, the husband of Mary, was still alive at the time this conversation took place? See John 6:42.
2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)? What did He mean when He said that those who come to Him will never go hungry and those who believe in Him will never be thirsty (John 6:35)?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said that people should eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:54-56)? In

what way should people “eat” His flesh and “drink” His blood?

4. Was Jesus speaking about partaking of the Lord’s Supper when He said that people should eat His flesh and drink His blood?

53.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES IN JERUSALEM

John 7:1-24

Jesus had been going to different places in and around Galilee, where He taught and healed many people. He was avoiding Judea and Jerusalem on purpose, because He knew that some of the leaders of the people, headquartered in Jerusalem, wanted to take His life (John 7:1).

When the Feast of Tabernacles was near, however, Jesus' brothers, who did not believe in Him (John 7:5), said to Him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world" (John 7:3-4 NIV).

Jesus, however, was not prepared to go to that Feast, at least, not yet. Sensing a sting in His brother's remarks, He said to them,

"The right time for me
has not yet come;
for you any time is right."

John 7:6 NIV

Jesus then warned His brothers of the spiritual condition that they were in. He said,

"The world cannot hate you,
but it hates me
because I testify that what it does is evil."

John 7:7 NIV

Then He said to them,

“You go to the Feast.
I am not yet going up to this Feast,
because for me the right time
has not yet come.”

John 7:8 NIV

After Jesus had said this, He stayed in Galilee for a while. A few days later, however, He went to Jerusalem for the Feast, but not publicly.

Now, the people at Jerusalem were talking about Jesus and watching to see if He would come to the Feast. They were asking, “Where is that man?” Some were saying, “He is a good man” (John 7:12); but others disagreed. They said, “No, he deceives the people.” Yet no one was saying anything about Him openly, because they feared the religious leaders (John 7:13).

Not until the feast was half over did Jesus finally go up to Jerusalem. When He got there, He went into the temple courts and began to teach.

As He was teaching, the people were amazed, for many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem had not heard Him teach before. Some of them asked, “How did this man get such learning without having studied” (John 7:15)?

Jesus answered,

“My teaching is not my own.
It comes from him who sent me.”

John 7:16 NIV

Anyone could determine for himself whether or not what Jesus was saying came from God. It depended on that person's attitude toward God. Jesus said,

“If anyone chooses to do God's will,
he will find out
whether my teaching comes from God
or whether I speak on my own.”

John 7:17 NIV

The very nature of Jesus' teaching also shows that He did not make it up out of His own mind. He said,

“He who speaks on his own
does so to gain honor for himself,
but he who works for the honor
of the one who sent him
is a man of truth;
there is nothing false about him.”

John 7:18 NIV

Then, Jesus uncovered the hidden motive of some of those that were listening to Him in Jerusalem. He accused them of not keeping the Law themselves and, at the same time, of trying to kill Him for not (as they supposed) keeping it. He said,

“Has not Moses given you the law?
Yet not one of you keeps the law.
Why are you trying to kill me?”

John 7:19 NIV

The crowd answered, “You are demon-possessed. Who is trying to kill you” (John 7:20)?

In reply, Jesus referred to the way that the religious leaders in Jerusalem had earlier reacted when He had healed a man on the Sabbath (John 5:8-9). He said,

“I did one miracle,
and you are all astonished.”

John 7:21 NIV

Jesus then defended His practice of healing on the Sabbath by referring to their practice of circumcising male babies on the 8th day, irrespective of whether or not the 8th day fell on a Sabbath. He said,

“Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?”

John 7:22-23 NIV

Jesus concluded this line of thought by urging,

“Stop judging by mere appearances,
and make a right judgment.”

John 7:24 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Was Jesus afraid for His life? Was that the reason He did not seek an early confrontation with His enemies in Judea? Was He afraid? What do you think? What did Jesus mean when He said that the time was not right for Him (John 7:6)?
2. Why did the world of Jesus' day hate Him? See John 7:7. Do many people hate Jesus today? Do many people love Jesus today?
3. Can a person tell whether Jesus originated His teaching by Himself or whether it came from God? How can a person tell? See John 7:17. How does a decision to "do God's will" help a person determine the truthfulness of Jesus' teaching?
4. Do you agree that a person that teaches or preaches His own ideas is trying to gain honor for himself? See John 7:18. Please comment.
5. How can we avoid (John 7:24) making judgments on the basis of appearances?

54.
IS THIS THE CHRIST?
John 7:25-36

Jesus was correct in saying (John 7:19) that the leaders in Jerusalem were trying to kill Him.

This became evident for all to see when some of the people in Jerusalem started asking, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill” (John 7:25)? They said, “Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ” (John 7:26)?

Some of the people thought that Jesus could not be the Christ, because it was generally assumed that He was from Galilee. They said, “But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from” (John 7:27).

The people that made that last statement were ill informed in two ways: They were wrong in thinking that no one was supposed to know where the Christ would come from (although the Old Testament clearly states in Micah 5:2 that the Christ would come from Bethlehem). They were also wrong in thinking that Jesus was born in Galilee.

Jesus was aware that people in Jerusalem were saying such things about Him, and He cried out in irony,

“Yes, you know me,
and you know where I am from.”

John 7:28a NIV

They thought they knew all about Jesus, but they actually knew very little about Him. He said,

“I am not here on my own,
but he who sent me is true.
You do not know him.”

John 7:28b NIV

Jesus said, regarding God,

“But I know him
because I am from him
and he sent me.”

John 7:29 NIV

Jesus’ listeners correctly understood that He was claiming to have been sent by God, and this claim made some of them so angry that they wanted to seize Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His time had not yet come (John 7:30).

In spite of opposition to His teaching from some in the crowd, many others put their faith in Him (John 7:31). They said,

“When the Christ comes,
will he do more miraculous signs
than this man?”

John 7:31 NIV

The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about Jesus, and they thought that something ought to be

done about Him. So the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest Him (John 7:32).

To those of the crowd who were still listening, Jesus said,

“I am with you for only a short time,
and then I go
to the one who sent me.
You will look for me,
but you will not find me;
and where I am, you cannot come.”

John 7:33-34 NIV

They asked one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks” (John 7:35 NIV)?

Some of them asked what Jesus meant when He said, “‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come’” (John 7:36).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What led some of the people to put their faith in Jesus?
See John 7:31.
2. What did Jesus mean when He said (John 7:33), “I go to the one who sent me?”
3. Jesus said that He was going to a place where His listeners could not go (John 7:34). Where do you think He was going? Why could they not go there?

55.
RIVERS OF LIVING WATER
John 7:37-52

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,

“If anyone is thirsty,
let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me,
as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow
from within him.”

John 7:37-38 NIV

Jesus meant by this that if anyone would come to Him and believe on Him, that person would receive the Holy Spirit in due time. The Holy Spirit was not yet being given to people at that time, due to the fact that Jesus had not yet been “glorified” (John 7:39).

On hearing Jesus’ words, some of the people said,

“Surely this man is the Prophet.”

John 7:40

Others went so far as to affirm,

“He is the Christ.”

John 7:41

Still others, unaware that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, asked, “How can the Christ come from Galilee?”

Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem [Micah 5:3], the town where David lived" (John 7:42 NIV)?

Thus, the people were divided about Jesus. Some of them wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. (John 7:43-44).

Finally the temple guards, who had been sent out to apprehend Jesus (John 7:32), went back empty handed to the chief priests and Pharisees.

The chief priests and Pharisees asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in" (John 7:45 NIV)?

The guards answered, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46 NIV).

The Pharisees replied, "You mean he has deceived you also? Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this crowd that knows nothing of the law is under God's curse" (John 7:47-49 NIV).

Nicodemus, who had come to talk to Jesus earlier (John 3:1-21), put in a good word for Jesus. Nicodemus asked his fellow rulers, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51 NIV).

The Pharisees turned on Nicodemus, and asked him, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee" (John 7:52 NIV).

Some late manuscripts of the Gospel of John say that while everyone went to his own home, Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives (John 7:53-8:1).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. The apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, stated that Jesus had not yet been “glorified” (John 7:39). Did the apostle John mean that Jesus had not yet risen from the dead, or that Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father, or that Jesus had not yet been seated at God’s right hand, or all three? What do you think John meant?
2. The temple guards did not arrest Jesus on this occasion (John 7:44). What reason did they give for not bringing Him in? What was it, do you suppose, about Jesus’ manner of speaking (or about His message) that made it difficult for them to take Him into custody?
3. Why did Nicodemus speak up (John 7:51-52) for Jesus? Do you think that He had been impressed with Jesus earlier when they had spoken together (John 3:1-21)? Do you think that Nicodemus was, at the time that he defended Jesus, a believer in Jesus?

56.
WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY
John 8:1-11

At dawn on the day following the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went up again to the temple courts in Jerusalem. He went there in spite of the fact that the religious rulers had, on the previous day, sent temple guards to arrest Him.

When He arrived at the temple, all the people there gathered around Him; and He sat down to teach them.

While He was there, some of the teachers of the Law and some of the Pharisees brought in a woman that had been caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand before everyone and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law [Leviticus 20:10], Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say” (John 8:4-5 NIV)?

Jesus was aware that they were trying to trap Him with this question in order to find something they could use against Him (John 8:6). So Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. All the while the lawyers and Pharisees kept on questioning Him. At last He straightened up and said to them,

“If any one of you is without sin,
let him be the first
to throw a stone at her.”

John 8:7 NIV

Then He stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. As He did so, those who heard what He said, began to go away. They left one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left; and the woman was still standing there (John 8:9).

Finally Jesus straightened up and asked the woman, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you” (John 8:10 NIV)?

She said, “No one, sir.”

Whereupon, Jesus declared, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:11).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. If Jesus had told the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees to stone the woman, what accusation do you think they would have brought against Him?
2. If Jesus had told them not to stone the woman, of what do you think they would have accused Him?
3. Did Jesus treat the woman compassionately? What do you think?
4. Why did the woman’s accusers leave? What do you think? Why did the older ones leave first?
5. Why did Jesus not condemn her sin? Do you think the woman left her life of sin?

57.
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
John 8:12-30

As Jesus was speaking to the people in Jerusalem on the day after the feast, He made another bold assertion about Himself, much as He had done the day before (John 7:37).

This time He said,

“I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me
will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12 NIV

Such a statement was sure to invite opposition from the Pharisees, and it did. They responded as though they were trying Him before a court. They accused Him of having no one to back up what He was saying about Himself. They said, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid” (John 8:13 NIV).

Jesus, however, did not back down. He replied,

“Even if I testify on my own behalf,
my testimony is valid,
for I know where I came from
and where I am going.
But you have no idea where I come from
or where I am going.”

John 8:14 NIV

Then Jesus said that His hecklers (John 8:15) were looking at things from a human point of view. He pointed out that He, in contrast to them, allowed God's decisions to prevail. He said,

“But if I do judge,
my decisions are right,
because I am not alone.
I stand with the Father,
who sent me.”

John 8:16 NIV

Jesus granted that the testimony of two people is necessary for a matter to prevail in court. He said,

“In your own Law it is written
that the testimony of two men is valid.

John 8:17 NIV

He reminded them, however, that He did have two witnesses. He said,

“I am one who testifies for myself;
my other witness is the Father,
who sent me.”

John 8:18 NIV

As a result of this statement, they asked Jesus, “Where is your father” (John 8:19a)? Jesus replied,

“You do not know me or my Father.”

John 8:19b NIV

He added further,

“If you knew me,
you would know my Father also.”

John 8:19c NIV

Jesus spoke these words while teaching at the temple, near the place where monetary offerings for the temple were laid. Amazingly, no one seized Him, in spite of the openness of His speech. They were not able to seize Him because His time had not yet come (John 8:20).

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying,

“I am going away,
and you will look for me,
and you will die in your sin.
Where I go, you cannot come.”

John 8:21 NIV

This made some of the people ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’” (John 8:22 NIV)?

Jesus continued speaking in words that were truthful, but which, no doubt, seemed arrogant to His critics. He said,

“You are from below;
I am from above.
You are of this world;

I am not of this world.”

John 8:23 NIV

Jesus sharpened His accusations even further, by saying,

“I told you
that you would die in your sins;
if you do not believe
that I am [the one I claim to be],
you will indeed die in your sins.”

John 8:24 NIV

So they asked, “Who are you?”
He replied,

“Just what I have been
claiming to be all along.”

John 8:25 NIV

As if to explain why He had spoken to His accusers in such a judgmental way, Jesus said,

“I have much to say in judgment of you.
But he who sent me is reliable,
and what I have heard from him
I tell the world.”

John 8:26 NIV

Jesus then made a reference to His crucifixion, but the people may not have understood it at the time. He said,

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man,
then you will know
that I am [the one I claim to be]
and that I do nothing on my own
but speak just what the Father
has taught me.”

John 8:28 NIV

Jesus went on to say,

“The one who sent me is with me;
he has not left me alone,
for I always do what pleases him.”

John 8:29 NIV

The teaching that Jesus did that day proved to be very fruitful; for many of the people that were listening to Him concluded that He spoke the truth, and they began to believe in Him, even as He spoke (John 8:30).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Is it true that people that follow Jesus do not walk in darkness but have light for their life? In what way does Jesus provide light?
2. Several times Jesus used the expression “I am” in this discussion (John 8:24, 28). Do you suppose that this reminded His listeners of the words that God spoke to Moses, when God said, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14)? Do you think that what Jesus said sounded like

blasphemy to some of those people in Jerusalem? What does Jesus' use of the expression "I am" imply to those of us who believe on Him?

3. Jesus said that He always did what pleased God (John 8:29). Do you suppose that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles because God indicated to Him that He should go, even though Jesus had told His brothers that He did not intend to go (John 7:8)?
4. Do you think God had communicated to Jesus that He should speak boldly in Jerusalem, in spite of the obvious danger? Do you suppose that God assured Jesus that He would protect Him on this trip to Jerusalem?
5. Do you think that Jesus always spoke the truth, even if it offended the people that heard Him? Should we do the same? How can we be sure that our assessments of people and situations are correct? Should we not be careful about expressing judgments on people?
6. Do you get the impression that the tension at this point between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem was growing?

58.**THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE**

John 8:31-47

As Jesus continued teaching in Jerusalem, He instructed His listeners how they could be sure that they were His disciples. He said,

“If you hold to my teaching,
you are really my disciples.”

John 8:31 NIV

Then He told them that the truth He was teaching, would set them free. He said,

“Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:32 NIV

Those of Jesus’ listeners that were rejecting His teaching, retorted, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free” (John 8:33 NIV)?

It was not true that the children of Israel had never been slaves. Some of Jesus’ listeners had forgotten that their forefathers were slaves in Egypt and that they themselves were slaves to sins? So Jesus replied,

“I tell you the truth,
everyone who sins

is a slave to sin.”

John 8:34 NIV

If they persisted in being slaves to sin, it would cancel their right to be in the family of God. Jesus said,

“Now a slave has no permanent place
in the family,
but a son belongs to it forever.”

John 8:35 NIV

God’s Son, however, can set people free from sin. Jesus said,

“So if the Son sets you free,
you will be free indeed.”

John 8:36 NIV

Jesus conceded that His listeners were physical descendants of Abraham, saying,

“I know you are Abraham’s descendants.”

John 8:37a NIV

He pointed out, however,

“Yet you are ready to kill me,
because you have no room for my word.”

John 8:37b NIV

If they had not been so occupied with doing what their father (the devil) told them to do, they would have listened to Jesus' description of what He had seen in God's presence. Jesus said,

“I am telling you
what I have seen in the Father's presence,
and you do what you have heard
from your father.”

John 8:38 NIV

Still, the people maintained ardently, “Abraham is our father.” Whereupon, Jesus said to them,

“If you were Abraham's children,
you would do
the things Abraham did.”

John 8:39 RSV

Jesus then pointed out in what way they were not acting like Abraham's children. He said,

“As it is,
you are determined to kill me,
a man who has told you the truth
that I heard from God.
Abraham did not do such things.”

John 8:40 NIV

He accused them of acting more like children of someone other than Abraham. He said,

“You are doing the things
your own father does.”

John 8:41 NIV

At that, they changed their statement as to whose children they were. They protested, “We are not illegitimate children. The only Father we have is God himself” (John 8:41).

Then Jesus said to them,

“If God were your Father,
you would love me,
for I came from God
and now I am here.
I have not come on my own;
but he sent me.”

John 8:42

Jesus’ hecklers could not understand what He was talking about. Could it be that there was something wrong with their hearing? Jesus asked them,

“Why is my language not clear to you?
Is it because you are unable
to hear what I say?”

John 8:43

Jesus then identified their real father. He accused them of being the devil’s children and of wanting to carry out the devil’s desire. He said,

“You belong to your father, the devil,

and you want to carry out
your father's desire.
He was a murderer from the beginning,
not holding to the truth,
for there is no truth in him.
When he lies,
he speaks his native language,
for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

John 8:44 NIV

Not only were Jesus' allegations extremely distasteful to them, but He was speaking the truth (and not lies, which they preferred); and that, in itself, made it difficult for them to believe in Him. He said to them,

“Yet because I tell the truth,
you do not believe me!”

John 8:45 NIV

There was nothing in what Jesus had said, or had done, that could excuse them for not believing what He said. He asked,

“Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?
If I am telling the truth,
why don't you believe me?”

John 8:46 NIV

Their unwillingness to accept what Jesus was saying showed clearly to whom they belonged. He said,

“He who belongs to God
hears what God says.
The reason you do not hear
is that you do not belong to God.”

John 8:47 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. How can Jesus' true disciples be identified? See John 8:31.
2. Jesus said that the truth sets people free (John 8:32). How does it set people free?
3. Jesus accused those people of wanting to carry out the desire of the devil (John 8:44)? Are there people today who want to carry out the devil's desire? How can we recognize such people?
4. Jesus said that the devil is a liar (John 8:44). Do you think the devil is still propagating lies? How can a person tell the difference between the truth and a lie?
5. Did anyone ever prove Jesus guilty of sin? See Hebrews 4:15.

59.
BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM
John 8:48-59

The strong debate between Jesus and His adversaries in Jerusalem continued. His adversaries insulted Him by asking Him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed” (John 8:48 NIV)?

Jesus answered,

“I have not a demon,
but I honor my Father
and you dishonor me”

John 8:49 RSV

Jesus expanded upon this by saying,

“I am not seeking glory for myself;
but there is one who seeks it,
and he is the judge.”

John 8: 50 NIV

Then Jesus challenged them with an important assertion. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
if anyone keeps my word,
he will never see death.”

John 8:51 NIV

His adversaries did not understand how a person could avoid seeing death. They exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death” (John 8: 52 NIV).

Then they asked, “Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are” (John 8:53 NIV)?

They felt that Jesus was exalting Himself; but they were wrong, for Jesus did not need to exalt Himself. God would do that; so He said,

“If I glorify myself,
my glory means nothing.
My Father,
whom you claim as your God,
is the one who glorifies me.”

John 8:54 NIV

Then Jesus laid His finger on the basic problem of His adversaries. He accused them of not knowing God. He said,

“Though you do not know him,
I know him.
If I said I did not,
I would be a liar like you,
but I do know him
and keep his word.”

John 8:55 NIV

Jesus spoke about things that were beyond their comprehension when He said,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced
at the thought of seeing my day;
he saw it and was glad.”

John 8: 56 NIV

That caused them to become exasperated with Jesus. They said, “You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham” (John 8:57 NIV)!

Jesus told them next something that made them lose all restraint. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
before Abraham was born,
I am!”

John 8:58

Jesus used the “I am” expression again, and He also claimed to have existed before Abraham. That was more than they could stand. So they picked up rocks to stone Him then and there; but Jesus evaded them (John 8:59), for His time had not yet come.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did Jesus mean when He said (John 8:51) that if anyone kept His word, that person would never see death?

2. In what way do you think Abraham saw Jesus' day (John 8:56)? Did He see it by faith?
3. Why was it, do you suppose, that Abraham rejoiced at seeing Jesus' day?
4. If Jesus was before Abraham, what does that imply about Jesus? See John 1:1-3.

60.**TRADITIONS OF MEN**

Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23

It was likely after Jesus returned to Galilee from Jerusalem that some of the Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem and gathered around Him (Mark 7:1). They observed that His disciples were eating food without washing their hands (Mark 7:2).

Now, it was the custom of the Pharisees and other children of Israel not to eat anything when they, for example, came from the marketplace, unless they had first washed their hands in a ceremonial way (Mark 7:3-4).

They also had other traditions, which they received from their elders regarding the washing of cups, pitchers, and bowls.

So the Pharisees from Jerusalem and those with them asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat” (Matthew 15:2 NIV)!

This question brought forth a challenging response from Jesus. He asked the Pharisees,

“And why do you break
the command of God
for the sake of your tradition?”

Matthew 15:3 NIV

This challenge may have taken the Pharisees by surprise.

He accused them of having let go of the commands of God and of holding to the traditions of men (Mark 7:8). He said further,

“You have a fine way of setting aside
the commands of God
in order to observe your own traditions!”

Mark 7:9 NIV

Jesus was referring to the excuse that some of the Pharisees were giving for neglecting their aged parents. He reminded them of what God had said through Moses, namely,

“‘Honor your father and mother’
and ‘Anyone who curses
his father or mother
must be put to death.’”

Matthew 15:4 NIV; Exodus 20:12; Exodus 21:17

Some of them seem to have thought that if a person were to say to his father or mother, “Whatever help you may have expected to get from me is ‘Corban’” (devoted to God), he could be free from helping his parents (Matthew 15:5-6 and Mark 7:11-12). Concerning this, Jesus said,

“Thus you nullify the word of God
by your tradition
that you have handed down.
And you do many things like that.”

Mark 7:13 NIV

Jesus also said,

“Isaiah was right
when he prophesied about you hypocrites;
as it is written:

‘These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules
taught by men.’”

Mark 7:6-7 NIV; Isaiah 29:13

Then Jesus called the crowd to Him and explained why it is not a sin for a person to eat without washing his hands. He said,

“Listen and understand.
What goes into a man’s mouth
does not make him ‘unclean,’
but what comes out of his mouth,
that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

Matthew 15:10-11 NIV

This teaching was revolutionary. It went against what the Pharisees had been taught from childhood. So Jesus’ disciples came to Him and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this” (Matthew 15:12)?

Jesus, however, was not perturbed that the Pharisees were offended. He said,

“Every plant that my heavenly Father
has not planted will be pulled up

by the roots.
Leave them; they are blind guides.
If a blind man leads a blind man,
both will fall into a pit.”

Matthew 15:13-14 NIV

Jesus then left the crowd and entered into the house (Mark 7:17), and His disciples went in with Him. Inside the house, Jesus’ disciples asked Him to explain His teaching about “clean” and “unclean” foods. Even for His disciples, this was too revolutionary to grasp immediately. So Peter thought that Jesus must have been speaking in parables. For that reason Peter requested, “Explain the parable to us.”

Then Jesus asked them, “Are you still so dull?” He also asked,

“Don’t you see that
whatever enters the mouth
goes into the stomach
and then out of the body?”

Matthew 15:17 NIV

Then He explained,

“But the things that come out of the mouth
come from the heart,
and these make a man ‘unclean.’
For out of the heart come evil thoughts,
murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft,
false testimony, slander.

These are what make a man ‘unclean’;
but eating with unwashed hands
does not make him ‘unclean.’”

Matthew 15:18-20 NIV

The Gospel of Mark says that with these words Jesus “declared all foods ‘clean’” (Mark 7:19 NIV). Thus, Jesus broke down the barrier between “clean” and “unclean” foods.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do Jesus’ followers have to follow the dietary restrictions (Leviticus 11:1-47) of the Old Testament? See Mark 7:19.
2. Which is more important for Jesus’ followers, the traditions of men or the words of Jesus?
3. Why does it make our worship of God “vain” (Mark 7:6-7) if we follow teachings and rules made by men.
4. Why was Jesus not perturbed (Matthew 15:12) when His disciples told Him that the Pharisees were offended by what He had said?
5. Do “the traditions of men” still pose a problem for some of Jesus’ followers today? If you answer ‘Yes;’ then, in what way do “the traditions of men” pose a problem for Jesus’ followers today?

61.
THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN
 Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

Sometime after this, Jesus left Galilee and went north to the Canaanite region near Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21), on the Mediterranean Sea.

Near Tyre, Jesus entered a certain house, but He did not want anyone to know that He was there.

Nevertheless, a Gentile woman, a Greek from the area where Syria and Phoenicia overlap, found out that Jesus was present.

Now, the Syrophoenician woman had a little daughter, who was possessed by an evil spirit (demon). So the woman came to Jesus and begged Him to drive the evil spirit out of her daughter.

The woman cried out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (Matthew 25:22 NIV); but Jesus did not pay any attention to her.

His disciples urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us” (Matthew 15:23).

Finally, however, Jesus relented and explained to the woman,

“I was sent
 only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

Matthew 15:24 NIV

That did not deter the woman. She came and knelt before Jesus and pleaded, “Lord, help me!”

He told her,

“First let the children eat
all they want;
it is not right to take the children’s bread
and toss it to their dogs.”

Mark 7:27 NIV

Even this harsh sounding rebuff did not stop the woman. She answered, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27; Mark 7:28).

After she said this, Jesus answered her,

“O woman, your faith is great;
be it done for you as you wish.”

Matthew 15:28 NAS

Then Jesus added,

“For such a reply,
you may go;
the demon has left your daughter.”

Mark 7:29 MIV

From that very hour, the woman’s daughter was healed. When the woman got home, she found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone (Matthew 15:28; Mark 7:30).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have any suggestions as to why Jesus at this juncture temporarily left off working in Galilee? If you have any suggestions, please share them.
2. Jesus was at first gruff with the Syrophenician woman. Why did He not want to help her? What do you think?
3. What made Jesus change His mind about helping this woman? What can we learn from her words (Mark 7:28)?
4. Was this the first time that Jesus had healed a Gentile? See Matthew 8:28-34?
5. Jesus said that God had sent Him only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel?” What did that mean?
6. Did God have a plan for helping Gentiles? See Ephesians 3:1-6. What are God’s plans for Gentiles?

62.
**A DEAF AND DUMB MAN IN THE REGION OF
THE DECAPOLIS**

Mark 7:31-37

Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon and came to the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31), which lay east and south of the Sea of Galilee.

Once He was there, people brought Him a deaf man, who could hardly talk. The people begged Jesus to place His hand on the man in order to heal him (Mark 7:32).

In response, Jesus took the deaf man aside, away from the crowd, and put His fingers in the man's ears. Then He spit and touched the man's tongue (Mark 7:33). Jesus looked up to heaven, and with a deep sigh said to the deaf man, "Ephphatha!" (Be opened!).

At that, the man's ears were opened; his tongue was loosed; and he began to speak plainly (Mark 7:35).

Following this, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone. However, the more He told them not to tell, the more they kept telling people about it (Mark 7:36).

The people from the Decapolis were overwhelmed with amazement when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. They said,

"He has done everything well;
He even makes the deaf to hear
and the mute to speak."

Mark 7:37

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Did there seem to be any type of illness that Jesus could not heal? What do you think? What do you conclude about Jesus from your answer?
2. The people that brought the deaf and dumb man to Jesus wanted Jesus to heal the man by placing His hands on him, but Jesus did something different. He spit and touched the man's tongue. In that way, He healed the man's ears (and the man's tongue). The question is, did Jesus seem to have a set ritual for healing people? Did He heal in a specific way, as, for example, by putting His hands on people? What do you think?
3. Jesus did not want the people in the Decapolis to tell others that He had healed the deaf and dumb man? Why did He not want them to tell others? What do you think?

63.**FEEDING THE 4,000**

Matthew 15:29-39; Mark 8:1-10

After some days spent near the Decapolis (Ten Cities), Jesus again walked along the Sea of Galilee, but in an area that was thinly populated.

He went up on a hillside and sat down (Matthew 15:29), and many people started coming to Him, as they usually did. They brought their lame, their blind, their crippled, their mute, and many others and laid them at His feet; and He healed them (Matthew 15:30).

The gospel of Matthew says, “The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they praised the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:31).

Since there was no place nearby to get food, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them,

“I have compassion for these people;
they have already been with me three days
and have nothing to eat.
If I send them home hungry,
they will collapse on the way,
because some of them
have come a long distance.”

Mark 8:2-3 NIV

His disciples responded, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd” (Matthew 15:33 NIV)?

Jesus asked, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish” (Matthew 15:34).

Then Jesus told the people to sit down on the ground, and He took the seven loaves and the fish. When He had given thanks, He broke them and gave them to the disciples. They, in turn, gave them to the people (Matthew 15:36); and they all ate and were satisfied.

When they had finished eating, the disciples picked up seven baskets full of broken pieces that were left over (Matthew 15:37).

That day, four thousand men had eaten, not counting women and children (Matthew 15:38).

After Jesus had sent the crowd away, He got into the boat with His disciples and went to the vicinity of Magadan (Matthew 15:39). The Gospel of Mark calls the place “Dalmanutha” (Mark 8:10). It is thought to have been near the town of Tiberias, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you get the impression that Jesus’ notoriety as a healer had spread far and wide?
2. Do you get the impression that Jesus’ healing ministry was rapidly supplanting His teaching ministry? Do you think Jesus was content to spend His time primarily with healing people? Please explain.

3. What motivated Jesus to feed the people on this occasion? See Mark 8:2.
4. Jesus fed 4,000 men on this occasion. How many people do you think He may have fed on this occasion, including women and children?
5. Why did Jesus provide food for people only twice (so far as we know)? What do you think? Why did He not provide food on a continuing basis?

64.
THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES
 Matthew 16:1-12; Mark 8:11-21

Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees had come to the conclusion that Jesus was not the Messiah, and some of them came to Galilee to try to trip Him up with questions. Intending this, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven (Matthew 16:1).

Jesus had already done many wonderful and miraculous things, from which the Pharisees and Sadducees could have known that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus, therefore, found it strange that they could not recognize that He was the Messiah. He said to them,

“When evening comes, you say,
 ‘It will be fair weather,
 for the sky is red,’
 and in the morning,
 ‘Today it will be stormy,
 for the sky is red and overcast.’”

Matthew 16:2-3a NIV

They could forecast the weather but they could not recognize that the days of the Messiah were upon them. He said,

“You know how
 to interpret the appearance of the sky,
 but you cannot interpret
 the signs of the times.”

Matthew 16:3b NIV

Instead of performing a miracle, as the Pharisees and Sadducees requested, Jesus gave them the same answer that He had given earlier when some of them had asked for a sign (Matthew 12:39-40). He said,

“A wicked and adulterous generation
looks for a miraculous sign,
but none will be given it
except the sign of Jonah.”

Matthew 16:4 NIV

Jesus and His disciples then got into the boat and left that place and went across the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 16:5).

Those of His disciples, who were responsible for the food, forgot to take bread along. The rest of the disciples were, apparently, disappointed that food had been forgotten.

As they were discussing it among themselves, Jesus said to them,

“Be careful;
be on your guard
against the yeast of the Pharisees,
of the Sadducees, and of Herod.”

Matthew 16:6

The disciples heard what Jesus said, but they were not sure what He meant. As they were discussing this, they surmised that Jesus was talking about bread when He warned about “the yeast of the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:7).

Jesus became aware of their discussions, and chided them for doubting that God would take care of them. He asked,

“Why are you talking about
having no bread?
Do you still not see or understand?
Are your hearts hardened?
Do you have eyes but fail to see,
and ears but fail to hear?
And don’t you remember?”

Mark 8:17-18 NIV

What was it that Jesus wanted them to remember? He explained,

“When I broke the five loaves
for the five thousand,
how many basketfuls of pieces
did you pick up?”

Mark 8:19 NIV

“Seven,” they replied.
Then He said,

“How is it you don’t understand
that I was not talking to you about bread?
But be on your guard against the yeast
of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matthew 16:11 NIV

The disciples, then, understood that Jesus was not talking about the yeast that is used in baking bread but

about the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:12).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What evidence could the Pharisees and Sadducees have seen, if they had cared to see it, that could have convinced them that the Messiah had come and that the kingdom of God was near?
2. Was it wrong for the Pharisees and Sadducees to ask for a sign? Is it all right for people to ask for a sign from heaven today? Do we need a sign from heaven to show us the right way? In what way is “the sign of Jonah” a sign also for us today?
3. What is the “yeast” (Matthew 16:6,12) against which Jesus warned? Were the Pharisees and other religious leaders preoccupied with material things? Did they doubt that God takes care of His people? What did the Pharisees teach by their actions?

65.
THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA
Mark 8:22-26

It would not be fair to say that Jesus had abandoned Galilee, but the evangelization of Galilee seemed no longer to have been His main concern. Instead, He and His disciples were spending a lot of time in their boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee, and landing here and there.

Once again they came to Bethsaida (Mark 8:22), a town thought to have been on the north Shore of the Sea of Galilee.

At Bethsaida, people brought Jesus a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. So Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. There, He spat on the man's eyes and put His hands on him.

Then Jesus asked, "Do you see anything" (Mark 8:23)?

The man looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around" (Mark 8:24 NIV).

So Jesus put His hands on the man's eyes. At that, the man's eyes were opened and his sight was restored, so that he saw everything clearly.

Then Jesus sent the man home, saying, "Don't go back into the village" (Matthew 8:26).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have any ideas as to why Jesus was no longer concentrating on evangelizing Galilee? Please share

your ideas. Had He already won a lot of followers in Galilee? What do you think?

2. What do you think may have gone through the mind of the blind man when he first found that he could see?
3. Jesus told the man to go straight home and not to go into the village? Why did Jesus tell the man that? What is your thinking?
4. Do you have any thoughts as to why Jesus first spat on the man's eyes, instead of touching him, as He was requested to do? Did it matter how Jesus healed people? Could He have healed without even touching the man if He had cared to do so?

66.**SIMON PETER'S CONFESSION**

Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21

Jesus started out with His disciples once again for the Decapolis. He was headed for the villages near the city of Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27).

As they were underway (Mark 8:27), Jesus paused in route in order to pray (Luke 9:18). At the place where they paused, Jesus asked His disciples,

“Who do people say
that the Son of Man is?”

Matthew 16:13 NIV

The disciples understood (correctly) that Jesus was speaking of Himself when He spoke of the “Son of Man.” So they answered Him, “Some say you are John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life” (Luke 9:19).

Then Jesus asked them, “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Then Simon Peter answered,

“You are the Christ,
the Son of the living God!”

Matthew 16:16 NIV

After Simon Peter had made this tremendous statement, Jesus pronounced a blessing upon him. Jesus

told Simon Peter that God Himself had revealed this truth to him (Peter). Jesus said,

“Blessed are you,
Simon son of Jonah,
for this was not revealed to you by man,
but by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 16:17 NIV

It was significant that Simon, to whom Jesus had given the name “Peter” (which means a stone), had arrived early at this bedrock truth, namely, that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). Jesus said,

“And I tell you that you are Peter,
and on this rock
I will build my church,...”

Matthew 16:18a NIV

The Greek word for “Peter” is “petros.” The Greek word, however, that is used in Matthew 16:18 for “rock” is “petra.” The difference between “petros” and “petra” is that “petros” represents a rock that is small enough to be thrown, whereas “petra” represents immovable bedrock.

Notice that Jesus announced in the above verse (Matthew 16:18) that He was planning to build a “church.” He was not thinking of a building to be constructed of wood, or of stone, or of some other building material. He was thinking an ingathering of people; for the Greek word “ekklesia,” which is found in Matthew 16:18, and which is translated “church,” means an assembly of people. From

this time forward it became clear that the kingdom of heaven was not to be a nebulous thing but to be something that had a definite form. It was to be a gathering of people.

Jesus had said many times that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) was near. Both He and John the Baptist had been preparing people to receive the kingdom of heaven when it came.

Jesus knew that the church would face resistance; but He predicted that it would be triumphant in spite of resistance. He said,

“...and the gates of Hades
will not overcome it.”

Matthew 16:18b NIV

Although Jesus did not base His church on Simon Peter’s person, He did grant Peter and the other apostles (John 20:23) the privilege of helping to introduce the church. They were to speak for God after Jesus was no longer on earth. Jesus promised Peter,

“I will give you
the keys of the kingdom of heaven;
whatever you bind on earth
will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth
will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16:19 NIV

Jesus cautioned His disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ (Matthew 16:20; Luke 9:21). They were

permitted, of course, to announce it later, when the time came.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Was this the first time that Jesus identified Himself as the “Son of Man?” See, for example, Matthew 8:20.
2. Are you surprised that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) was to be a gathering of people, a church? Did you expect the kingdom of heaven to be something different from that? Are you disappointed? Please explain.
3. Was the church founded on Simon Peter? See 1 Corinthians 3:11.
4. Did Jesus appoint Peter (in Matthew 16:18) to be the first pope? Was the apostle Peter to be over the other apostles in some administrative way? See Matthew 20:25-26. Was Peter supposed to be the head of the church? See Ephesians 5:23.
5. Jesus gave the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter (Matthew 16:19). What was it that Peter was to unlock and to lock with the keys?
6. To whom does Jesus’ church belong? Whose name should it wear?

67.**HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FORETOLD**

Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-9:1; Luke 9:22-27

After Simon Peter confessed his belief that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), Jesus explained to Peter and to all the apostles that He (Jesus) must go to Jerusalem, where the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the Law would reject Him. He said that He would have to suffer many things at the hands of the leaders and be put to death. He also said that He would be raised to life on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22).

This was not the first time that Jesus had made reference to His death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40; John 2:19-21); but this time, He told His disciples plainly (Mark 8:32) what would happen.

This upset Simon Peter so much that he took Jesus aside and said to Him, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”

Jesus then turned; and looking toward the disciples, He said to Peter,

“Get behind me, Satan!
You are a stumbling block to me;
you do not have in mind the things of God,
but the things of men.”

Matthew 16:23 NIV

After that, Jesus called the crowd to Him (Mark 8:34) and repeated for them some of what He had told His twelve

apostles before He sent them out on their first mission journey (Matthew 10:38). He said,

“If anyone would come after me,
he must deny himself
and take up his cross and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24 NIV

This may sound as though Jesus were asking something unreasonable of His followers; but it was not unreasonable, because self-sacrificial living is the only reasonable way to live. Jesus explained,

“For whoever wants to save his life
will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for me
and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:35 NIV

Many people seem to think that the most important things in life are health, power, prosperity, and pleasure; but Jesus knew otherwise. He asked,

“What good will it be for a man
if he gains the whole world,
yet forfeits his soul?
Or what can a man give
in exchange for his soul?”

Matthew 16:26 NIV

Jesus wanted His people to be aware of what will happen at the end of time. He said,

“For the Son of Man
is going to come in his Father’s glory
with his angels,
and then he will reward each person
according to what he has done.”

Matthew 16:27 NIV

Jesus knew that some of His followers might turn aside from following Him and become ashamed of Him and of His words. He warned that if that should happen, He (Jesus) would be ashamed of such people at the end of time. He said,

“If anyone is ashamed of me
and my words
in this adulterous and sinful generation,
the Son of Man will be ashamed of him
when he comes in his Father’s glory
with the holy angels.”

Mark 8:38 NIV

Jesus assured His listeners that the kingdom of God (the church) would be introduced in the lifetime of some of them. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
some who are standing here
will not taste death

before they see the kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:27 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Jesus call Simon Peter “Satan” (Matthew 16:23)? How was Peter a stumbling block to Jesus?
2. Does Jesus ask people to bear a cross today? Name a few of the “crosses” that people are sometimes called upon to bear.
3. Please explain how a person that wants to save his life might lose it (Matthew 16:25). Please, give an example if you can.
4. Please explain how a person that is willing to lose his life for Jesus’ sake, and for the gospel’s, might save it. Give an example if you can.
5. The kingdom of God (the church) had, obviously, not yet come into existence when Jesus said, “Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27) come with power” (Mark 9:1). When was the kingdom of God (the church) introduced “with power?” See Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-36.
6. Jesus will return (Mark 8:48) in His Father’s glory and with His holy angels. When will that happen? Will it be at the end of time? See Matthew 24:30-31.

68.**THE TRANSFIGURATION**

Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36

One week after Simon Peter confessed that He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus led three of His disciples up on a high mountain to pray.

Peter, James, and John were alone there with Jesus. They were very sleepy and began to doze off.

As Jesus was praying, His appearance changed (Luke 9:29). His face began to shine like the sun (Matthew 17:2); and His clothes became as bright as light; and two men appeared with Him in glorious splendor (Luke 9:30-31). Their clothes were whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them (Mark 9:3).

When the three disciples were fully awake, they saw Jesus' radiance, and they also saw Moses and Elijah standing with Him (Luke 9:32). Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about His death, which would take place very soon at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

When Moses and Elijah were on the point of leaving (Luke 9:33), Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matthew 17:4 NIV).

Peter was so frightened that he did not know what he was talking about (Luke 9:33); and James and John were frightened, too (Mark 9:6).

While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud began to overshadow them (Matthew 17:5); and they became even more frightened as the cloud came over them (Luke 9:34).

A voice from the cloud said,

“This is my beloved Son,
whom I have chosen;
with him I am well pleased.
Listen to him!”

Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

When the disciples heard the voice, they fell facedown on the ground and were terrified (Matthew 17:6), but Jesus came to them, touched them, and said,

“Get up,
and do not be afraid.”

Matthew 17:7 NASU

When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them to tell no one what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead (Mark 9:9). So they kept the matter to themselves (Luke 9:36). They discussed it among themselves, however, what Jesus could have meant when He spoke of His “rising from the dead.”

The thought of their having seen Moses and Elijah, prompted the three disciples to ask Jesus, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first” (Matthew 17:10 NIV)? They were referring to a prophecy that Malachi had made (Malachi 4:5-6).

Jesus replied to them,

“To be sure,

Elijah does come first,
and restores all things.”

Mark 9:12a NIV

Jesus then raised one of the central issues of the Bible,
by asking them,

“Why then is it written
that the Son of Man must suffer much
and be rejected?”

Mark 9:12b NIV

Jesus did not immediately give an answer to that
question; but later on, His answer to it became clear from
what He did and what He said.

Jesus resumed talking about Elijah. He said,

“But I tell you,
Elijah has already come,
and they did not recognize him,
but have done to him
everything they wished.”

Matthew 17:12a NIV

The disciples understood that He was talking about
John the Baptist. It seems that the things that happened to
John the Baptist were an indication of what would happen
to Jesus.

Jesus said,

“In the same way

the Son of Man is going to suffer
at their hands.”

Matthew 17:12b NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. The voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, whom I have chosen; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him” (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35)! Is it more important, today, for people to listen to Jesus than it is for them to listen to Moses and the Prophets of the Old Testament? What do you think?
2. What do you think the significance is of the transfiguration of Jesus? What did His transfiguration show?
3. The Old Testament foretold that a man called “Elijah” would come (Malachi 4:5-6). Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist was the “Elijah” of whom Malachi had spoken (Matthew 17:11-13) and that he (John the Baptist) would “restore all things” (Mark 9:12). What was it that John the Baptist began to restore? See Luke 1:16-17.
4. Does Jesus also have a part in restoring all things? Has the restoration of all things now been completed? See Acts 3:21.
5. It is written in the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer much and be rejected? See Psalms 22:6; Isaiah

53:3; and Daniel 9:26. Jesus asked, “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected” (Mark 9:12b NIV). What do you think the answer to Jesus’ question is?

69.**THE BOY WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT**

Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43

The day after (Luke 9:37) Jesus was transfigured, He came down from the mountain with Peter, James, and John. They came to the place where the rest of His disciples were waiting.

Jesus saw the waiting disciples being besieged by scribes, who were arguing with them. He also saw a large crowd of people surrounding them (Mark 9:14).

As soon as the people in the crowd saw Jesus, they became excited and rushed to greet Him (Mark 9:15). Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about with His disciples (Mark 9:16).

A man from the crowd approached Jesus, bowed down (Matthew 17:14), and called out a plea for Jesus to look at his only son (Luke 9:38). The man said, “Teacher, I brought you my son. He is possessed by an evil spirit (demon), which has robbed him of His speech. Whenever the spirit seizes him, it throws him to the ground; and he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid” (Mark 9:17-18a).

The man continued, “The spirit scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him” (Luke 9:39b).

The man added, “I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not” (Luke 9:40).

Jesus seemed disappointed, possibly because His disciples could not heal the boy, or possibly because the boy’s father did not have much faith. Jesus said,

“O unbelieving generation,
 how long shall I be with you?
 How long shall I bear with you?
 Bring him to Me”

Mark 9:19

Then they brought the boy to Jesus. When the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a convulsion. The boy fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth (Mark 9:20).

Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has this been happening to him” (Mark 9:21 NKJV)?

The man answered that it had been happening since the boy’s childhood.

The man added, “Often the evil spirit has thrown him into the fire or into the water to destroy him. Have compassion on us and help us, if you can” (Mark 9:22).

Jesus did not seem to be pleased with the words, “If you can,” which the man used. These words implied that the man did not fully believe that Jesus was able to drive out the spirit, so Jesus said to the man,

“Everything is possible
 for him who believes.”

Mark 9:23 NIV

The boy’s father was aware that his faith was weak, so he exclaimed,

“I do believe;
 help me overcome my unbelief!”

Mark 9:24 NIV

While people were still coming to Jesus, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it,

“Deaf and dumb spirit,
I command you,
come out of him
and enter him no more!”

Mark 9:25

Then the spirit cried out, convulsed the boy greatly, and came out of him. Afterwards, the boy looked so weak that many people said, “He is dead;” but Jesus took the boy by the hand and lifted him up. At that, the boy stood up (Mark 9:27) and Jesus gave him back to his father.

Everyone that witnessed this was amazed at the greatness of God, and they marveled at all the things that Jesus was doing (Luke 9:43).

After Jesus had gone indoors with His disciples, the disciples asked Him privately why they could not drive out the evil spirit (Mark 9:28).

Jesus replied,

“Because you have so little faith.
I tell you the truth,
if you have faith as small as a mustard seed,
you can say to this mountain,
‘Move from here to there’
and it will move.
Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:20 NIV

Jesus added, however,

“This kind can come out
only by prayer.”

Mark 9:29 NIV

Some versions say, “This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.” However, the words “and fasting” are not found in this verse in the oldest Greek manuscripts.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus said, “Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23 NIV). Did Jesus mean that any person can perform miracles of healing, if he believes that he can? Or did He mean that He, Jesus, was especially willing to heal people who had faith in Him? What do you think?
2. When Jesus said to the apostles, “Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20), did He mean that every person can do anything, no matter how great, as long as he believes he can? Or did Jesus mean that the apostles could do anything that they had enough faith to do? What do you think?

70.**JESUS FORETOLD HIS DEATH AGAIN, and THE
TEMPLE TAX**

Matthew 17:22-27; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43b-45

Jesus and His disciples left the place where Jesus had healed the boy that had an unclean spirit, and Jesus and His disciples passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know that He was there, because He was spending all the time He could teaching His disciples (Mark 9:30-31). He was preparing them for what would happen at Jerusalem. He said to them,

“The Son of Man
is going to be betrayed
into the hands of men.
They will kill him,
and after three days he will rise.”

Mark 9:31 NIV

The disciples did not grasp the full significance of what Jesus was saying, because it was hidden from them (Luke 9:45); and they were afraid to ask Him about it (Mark 9:32).

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Simon Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax” (Matthew 17:24)?

Peter replied, “Yes, He does.”

When Peter went into the house where Jesus was, Jesus spoke first. Jesus knew that Peter had been asked for

the temple tax, even before Peter mentioned it. Jesus asked Simon Peter,

“What do you think, Simon?
From whom do the kings of the earth
take customs or taxes,
from their sons or from strangers?”

Matthew 17:25 NKJV

Peter answered, “From strangers” (Matthew 17:26a), which was the correct answer, for kings in those days exacted customs from merchants and travelers passing through their lands.

So Jesus said to Peter,

“Then the sons are free.
Nevertheless,
lest we offend them,
go to the sea, cast in a hook,
and take the fish that comes up first.
And when you have opened its mouth,
you will find a piece of money;
take that and give it to them
for Me and you.”

Matthew 17:26b-27 NKJV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. The disciples had difficulty understanding (Mark 9:32) that Jesus was going to be put to death in Jerusalem and

be raised again after three days. Why was it difficult for them to understand this? What do you think?

2. In what way have the nations of the earth changed their taxation policies since Jesus' day?
3. God spoke of Jesus as "My Son" (Matthew 17:5); and Jesus spoke of the temple as "My father's house" (Luke 2:49). Since Jesus is God's Son, and since the temple belongs to His Father, does that imply that Jesus should be free of having to pay the temple-tax? What do you think?
4. If Jesus was not obligated to pay the temple tax, why did He pay it? What can we learn from His having paid it?

71.

WHO IS THE GREATEST? and “HE WHO IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US”

Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-41; Luke 9:46-50

When Jesus and His disciples were in the house in Capernaum, Jesus asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road” (Mark 9:33 NIV)?

They had been arguing about who was the greatest among them (Mark 9:34); but they were, apparently, too ashamed to give Jesus an immediate answer.

However, Jesus knew what they had been arguing about (Luke 9:47); so He sat down and called the Twelve to Him and said to them,

“If anyone wants to be first,
he must be the very last,
and the servant of all.”

Mark 9:35 NIV

Finally, they got around to asking Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1)?

In response, Jesus called a little child into their presence (Matthew 18:2). He then took the child into His arms (Mark 9:36) and said to them,

“I tell you the truth,
unless you change
and become like little children,
you will never enter

the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3 NIV

Then Jesus said,

“Therefore, whoever humbles himself
like this child
is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:4 NIV

Continuing to speak about the child, He said,

“Whoever welcomes this little child
in my name welcomes me;
and whoever welcomes me
welcomes the one who sent me.
For he who is least among you all—
he is the greatest.”

Luke 9:48 NIV

The disciples seemed to be anxious to change the subject. So John, the brother of James, spoke up and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us” (Luke 9:49 NKJV).

Jesus did not go into the question of whether or not the man, whom the disciples saw, should have been trying to cast out demons in Jesus’ name. Instead, Jesus seemed more interested in correcting the attitude that John had expressed.

Concerning the man, Jesus said,

“Do not forbid him,
for no one
who works a miracle in My name
can soon afterward speak evil of Me.
For he who is not against us
is on our side.”

Mark 9:39-40 NKJV

Jesus told His disciples that if anyone aided them in any way, that person would be rewarded for having helped them. He said,

“I tell you the truth,
anyone who gives you a cup of water
in my name
because you belong to Christ
will certainly not lose his reward.”

Mark 9:41 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it not possible for a person to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3) unless he becomes like a little child? What do you think?
2. Why must a person humble himself before he can become great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4)? If a person succeeds in humbling himself, is he then at liberty to lord it over his brothers and sisters?

3. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Luke 9:48 NIV)?
4. Jesus told His disciples not to hinder a person that cast out demons in His name, even if that person did not follow with Jesus’ disciples (Luke 9:50). What can we learn from this?
5. How can Jesus statement in Mark 9:40 (“For he who is not against us is on our side”) be reconciled with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 12:30 (“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters”)? Was Jesus speaking about the same person in both verses? Was He speaking about the devil in Matthew 12:29-30?
6. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will not lose his reward” (Mark 9:41)?

72.

CAUSING LITTLE ONES TO SIN

Matthew 18:6-10; Mark 9:42-50

Jesus had just called a little child into His presence (Matthew 18:2) and told His disciples that they must become like children (Matthew 18:3).

Following that, Jesus spoke of the punishment that is coming upon those that cause little ones to sin. He said,

“But if anyone causes
one of these little ones
who believe in me to sin,
it would be better for him
to have a large millstone
hung around his neck
and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

Matthew 18:6 NIV

Jesus then spoke a “woe” over the world because of the many temptations that cause people to sin. He said,

“Woe to the world
because of the things
that cause people to sin!”

Matthew 18:7a NIV

Sadly, temptations to sin are in this world unavoidable. Jesus spoke a “woe” also over the individual that sets temptations, which cause other people to sin. He said,

“Such things must come,
but woe to the man
through whom they come!”

Matthew 18:7b NIV

Jesus advised His followers to get rid of everything that causes them to sin. He said,

“If your hand causes you to sin,
cut it off.
It is better for you to enter life maimed
than with two hands to go into hell,
where the fire never goes out.”

Mark 9:43 NIV

Similarly, He said,

“And if your foot causes you to sin,
cut it off.
It is better for you to enter life crippled
than to have two feet
and be thrown into hell.”

Mark 9:45 NIV

In addition, He said,

“And if your eye causes you to sin,
pluck it out.
It is better for you to enter
the kingdom of God with one eye

than to have two eyes
and be thrown into hell,..."

Mark 9:47 NIV

Jesus then spoke further about hell. He said (quoting Isaiah 66:24) that hell is a place,

““where their worm does not die
and the fire is not quenched.””

Mark 9:48 NIV

He added,

“Everyone will be salted with fire.”

Mark 9:49 NIV

These statements seem to refer to the persistence and severity of punishment in hell.

Next, Jesus said,

“Salt is good,
but if it loses its saltiness,
how can you make it salty again?
Have salt in yourselves,
and be at peace with each other.”

Mark 9:50 NIV

Finally, speaking again of the “little ones,” Jesus said,

“See that you do not look down
on one of these little ones.
For I tell you

that their angels in heaven always
see the face of my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 18:10 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Was Jesus speaking only of getting rid of a hand, a foot, or an eye (Mark 9:43-47; Matthew 18:9)? Or was He illustrating how drastically a person ought to get rid of everything that causes that person to sin?
2. Can a person that has caused a child to sin find forgiveness? Can a person that has caused some adult to sin find forgiveness? What do you think? What can that person do to find forgiveness?
3. The angels of the “little ones” “always see the face” (Matthew 18:10) of God in heaven? How is that a reason not to “look down on” the “little ones” (Matthew 18:10)? What do you think?
4. This was not the first time (Mark 9:50) that Jesus spoke about salt losing its saltiness. He had spoken about it in Matthew 5:13 and He would speak about it again in Luke 14:34. What did Jesus mean when He said (Mark 9:50), “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other?”

73.

PARABLE OF A LOST SHEEP and DEALING WITH A BROTHER OR SISTER THAT SINS

Matthew 18:11-20

Jesus warned His disciples not to look down on any of the little ones who believe on Him (Matthew 18:10).

Coming to the thought that God is interested in saving everyone, Jesus said,

“For the Son of Man has come
to save that which was lost.”

Matthew 18:11 NKJV

(The thought expressed in Matthew 18:11 does not appear at this point in some manuscripts. It does appear, however, in Matthew 9:13 and Luke 19:10.)

To illustrate the importance of each person, Jesus told a version His parable about a man that owned a hundred sheep and lost one. He said,

“What do you think?
If a man owns a hundred sheep,
and one of them wanders away,
will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills
and go to look for the one
that wandered off?”

Matthew 18:12 NIV

Then Jesus said,

“And if he finds it,
I tell you the truth,
he is happier about that one sheep
than about the ninety-nine
that did not wander off.”

Matthew 18:13 NIV

Jesus explained the message of His parable, by saying,

“In the same way
your Father in heaven
is not willing
that any of these little ones should be lost.”

Matthew 18:14 NIV

Jesus then gave some practical advice about retrieving a lost brother. He said,

“If your brother sins against you,
go and show him his fault,
just between the two of you.
If he listens to you,
you have won your brother over.”

Matthew 18:15 NIV

Jesus, next, told what a member of the church should do, if a brother that has offended him, refuses to listen to his admonition. He said,

“But if he will not listen,
take one or two others along,

so that ‘every matter may be established
by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”

Matthew 18:16 NIV

Jesus explained how the church, which He planned to establish, could be called upon to help resolve disagreements among brethren. Jesus said,

“If he refuses
to listen to them [the witnesses],
tell it to the church;
and if he refuses to listen even to the church,
treat him as you would a pagan
or a tax collector.”

Matthew 18:17 NIV

From this it becomes clear that God respects the decisions, which a local congregation makes with regards to withholding fellowship from the unrighteous brother, who refuses to acknowledge his fault.

Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth,
whatever you bind on earth
will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth
will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18 NIV

Thus we see that a local congregation of Jesus’ followers can, in a sense, “bind” and “loose;” for what a

congregation lays before the Father in prayer, and what it decides upon, influences the Father. Jesus said,

“Again, I tell you
that if two of you on earth agree
about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you
by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 18:19 NIV

The respect that God has for the decisions that a congregation makes, is an indication of how important congregations are in God’s sight.

Congregations are important also because Jesus is present in their gatherings. Jesus said,

“For where two or three come together
in my name,
there am I with them.”

Matthew 18:20 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What can we learn from the parable of the shepherd that went out looking for a lost sheep and was happy when he found it (Matthew 18:12-14)?
2. If you feel that a brother or sister in the church has wronged you, what should you do? See Matthew 18:15.

3. What should you do if the brother or sister that has wronged you does not acknowledge that he or she has done wrong, even though you have pointed it out to him or her? See Mathew 18:16.
4. What should you do if a brother or sister, who has wronged you refuses to admit it and make it right, even though you have taken one or two other brethren with you to talk to that brother or sister? See Matthew 18:17.
5. In what way does a congregation of Jesus' followers have the right to "bind" (Matthew 18:18)? Should a congregation try to "bind" by making laws on its own?
6. How can a congregation "loose?" Does a congregation have the right to "loose" any teaching or any command that Jesus gave?

74.**THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT**

Matt 18:21-19:1

Jesus had been teaching His disciples about how they should treat a brother that sins against them (Matthew 18:15-20).

Afterwards, Simon Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times” (Matthew 18:21 NIV)?

Jesus answered,

“I tell you,
not seven times,
but seventy-seven times.”

Matthew 18:22 NIV

In order to give a fuller answer to Peter’s question about how many times, Jesus told a parable to illustrate the attitude that His followers should have toward each other. He said,

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven
is like a king
who wanted to settle accounts
with his servants.”

Matthew 18:23 NIV

As the king began settling accounts, a servant who owed him ten thousand talents was brought before him. The servant was not able to pay. So the lord of that servant

ordered him to be sold, including his wife, his children, and all that he had, in order to pay the debt.

At that, the servant fell to his knees and begged, “Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything.”

Then his lord took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

Now, when that servant went out, he found a fellow servant that owed him only a hundred denarii. In spite of the fact that this debt was relatively small, he grabbed his fellow servant by the neck and began to choke him, saying, “Pay me what you owe me!”

The unforgiving servant refused to listen to his fellow servant, even though that servant fell to his knees and begged, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.” Instead, he went and had the fellow servant thrown into prison, until he could pay the debt (Matthew 18:30).

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed. So they went to their lord and told him everything that had happened.

Then the king called the servant in and said to him,

“You wicked servant!
I forgave you all that debt
because you begged me.
Should you not also
have had compassion
on your fellow servant,
just as I had pity on you?”

Matthew 18:32-33 NKJV

The servant's lord was so angry that he turned the servant over to the torturers, until he could pay the debt (Matthew 18:34).

Regarding this, Jesus said,

“So My heavenly Father
also will do to you
if each of you,
from his heart,
does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Matthew 18:35 NKJV

When Jesus finished speaking these things, He brought His Galilean ministry to a close. He left Galilee and came to the area of Judea that was on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Matthew 19:1).

So far as we know, Jesus did not return to Galilee until after He had arisen from the dead (John 21:1).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. God wants us to forgive each other. Why does He want us to forgive each other? Will God forgive us if we do not forgive others?
2. How many times should we be willing to forgive a brother or a sister of the same fault? Should we forgive only seventy-seven times? What do you think?

3. How large was the debt, which the first servant owed? The weight of a talent is about 30 kilograms. Assuming that the debt was in gold, about how much did he owe?
4. About how large was the second servant's debt? The value of a denar was about the wage that was paid a man for a day's labor. What do you deduce from the disparity in the size of the two debts?
5. Will God punish us for the sins that He does not forgive? What do you think?